



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 25 MAY 2022

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Events, Opportunities

HEADLINE	05/25 Vigil, rally 2nd anniversary Floyd killing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/vigil-rally-planned-for-2nd-anniversary-of-floyd-killing/
GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A candlelight vigil to honor George Floyd’s memory at the intersection where he died was among the remembrances scheduled for Wednesday’s second anniversary of the Black man’s killing at the hands of Minneapolis police officers.</p> <p>Activists planned the vigil, along with a rally at the governor’s residence in St. Paul, for the two-year anniversary of Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020, which ignited protests in Minneapolis and around the world as bystander video quickly spread.</p> <p>The intersection of 38th and Chicago streets became known informally as George Floyd Square in the wake of his death, with a large sculpture of a clenched fist as the centerpiece of memorials. The city planned to unveil a street sign officially dubbing the corner George Perry Floyd Square just ahead of the vigil, with Floyd’s brother Terrence among those attending.</p> <p>Later events include a Thursday gathering of families of loved ones who have died in interactions with police and a fundraising gala Friday aimed at raising money to preserve offerings left by protesters and mourners at the intersection where Floyd was killed.</p> <p>An all-day festival and a concert at the intersection were also planned for Saturday.</p> <p>Floyd, 46, died after Officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, pinned his knee on Floyd’s neck for 9 1/2 minutes as Floyd was handcuffed and pleaded that he couldn’t breathe.</p> <p>Chauvin is serving 22 1/2 years in prison after being convicted of state charges of murder and manslaughter last year. The ex-officer also pleaded guilty to violating Floyd’s civil rights in a federal case, where he now faces a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years.</p> <p>Former officers J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao are scheduled to stand trial on state charges in June. Thomas Lane pleaded guilty last week to aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter for his role in Floyd’s killing, months after all three former Officers were convicted in February of federal charges of willfully violating Floyd’s rights.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Russia: new nukes so speak more politely
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-nato/2022/05/24/id/1071346/
GIST	<p>Moscow claims it will soon have 50 new advanced nuclear missiles capable of annihilating its enemies by the fall; a move by the Kremlin that the Washington Examiner says is a show of strength in the face of military blunders in Ukraine.</p> <p>The head of Russia's state space agency Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, warned Sunday that the NATO dubbed "Satan-2" missiles or Sarmat-2 intercontinental ballistic missiles, which measure 14 stories tall, will soon be combat-ready.</p> <p>In a New York Post report, Rogozin, a staunch ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, said, "I suggest that aggressors speak to us more politely."</p> <p>On Sunday, Rogozin tweeted a video showing the impact of a blank Satan-2 at the Kura Missile Test Range in Russia's Kamchatka region. The crater measured 26 feet deep and 66 feet wide.</p> <p>"When equipped with a nuclear warhead," Rogozin warned, "such a crater at an enemy target (geographic target) would be ... very ... very large and very deep and radioactive. And not just one, but exactly as many as the most powerful nuclear missile in the world will deliver to the territory of a hateful enemy."</p>

	<p>Rogozin cautioned in February that Russia controls the International Space Station's engines, and if countries imposed sanctions, it could — at any time — crash the facility into the Earth. Putin said last month that the successful launching of the Sarmat-2 should make Russia's enemies "think twice" before threatening the country. The Russian Ministry of Defence has since hailed the missile as the most powerful and longest-ranged weapon in the world.</p> <p>Two weeks ago, Rogozin said Russia could expunge Ukraine from the map. Putin has not ruled out the possibility of using nuclear arms against Ukraine.</p> <p>In a Telegram post, Rogozin said, "NATO is waging war against us. It has not declared it, but it doesn't change anything. Now it's obvious to everyone. In a nuclear war, NATO countries will be destroyed by us in half an hour. But we must not allow it, because the consequences of the exchange of nuclear strikes will affect the state of our Earth."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Sales of new homes plunge in April
SOURCE	https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/24/sales-of-new-homes-plunge-in-april-00034708
GIST	<p>Sales of new single-family homes plummeted in April as rising mortgage interest rates and skyrocketing house prices took a toll on the market.</p> <p>New-home sales fell 16.6 percent last month from the revised March figures, according to Census Bureau data released Tuesday. Sales were down 26.9 percent from April 2021.</p> <p>“The April drop for new home sales is a clear recession warning,” said Robert Dietz, chief economist for the National Association of Home Builders.</p> <p>The median sales price of new houses sold last month was \$450,600, 19.6 percent higher than a year earlier. The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage was about 5.3 percent last week, according to Freddie Mac, up from 3.2 percent in the first week of January.</p> <p>“The combination of higher prices and increased interest rates are generating a notable slowing of the housing market,” Dietz said. “While the nation needs additional housing, home sales are slackening as tightening monetary policy continues to put upward pressure on mortgage rates and supply chain disruptions raise construction costs.”</p> <p>There were an estimated 444,000 new homes for sale in April — a supply of nine months at the current sales rate, compared with 4.7 months a year earlier.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/25 China eyes sweeping agreement in Pacific
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/wang-yi-beijing-china-new-zealand-96f78c9707116055ebc3e7c216a0ef8
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — China wants 10 small Pacific nations to endorse a sweeping agreement covering everything from security to fisheries in what one leader warns is a “game-changing” bid by Beijing to wrest control of the region.</p> <p>A draft of the agreement obtained by The Associated Press shows that China wants to train Pacific police officers, team up on “traditional and non-traditional security” and expand law enforcement cooperation.</p> <p>China also wants to jointly develop a marine plan for fisheries — which would include the Pacific’s lucrative tuna catch — increase cooperation on running the region’s internet networks, and set up cultural Confucius Institutes and classrooms. China also mentions the possibility of setting up a free trade area with the Pacific nations.</p> <p>China’s move comes as Foreign Minister Wang Yi and a 20-strong delegation begin a visit to the region this week.</p>

Wang is visiting seven of the countries he hopes will endorse the “Common Development Vision” — the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea.

Wang is also holding virtual meetings with the other three potential signatories — the Cook Islands, Niue and the Federated States of Micronesia. He is hoping the countries will endorse the pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after a scheduled May 30 meeting in Fiji he is holding with the foreign ministers from each of the 10 countries.

But Micronesia’s President David Panuelo has written an eight-page letter to the leaders of other Pacific nations saying his nation won’t be endorsing the plan and warning of dire consequences if others do.

Panuelo said in his letter, which the AP has obtained, that behind attractive words in the agreement like “equity” and “justice” are many worrying details.

Among other concerns, he said, is that the agreement opens the door for China to own and control the region’s fisheries and communications infrastructure. He said China could intercept emails and listen in on phone calls.

Panuelo said in his letter that the agreement is “an intent to shift those of us with diplomatic relations with China very close to Beijing’s orbit, intrinsically tying the whole of our economies and societies to them.”

He warns the agreement would needlessly heighten geopolitical tensions and threaten regional stability.

In his letter, Panuelo said the Common Development Vision is “the single most game-changing proposed agreement in the Pacific in any of our lifetimes,” and it “threatens to bring a new Cold War era at best, and a World War at worst.”

Panuelo declined to comment on the letter or the proposed agreement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Wednesday he didn’t know about Panuelo’s letter.

“But I don’t agree at all with the argument that cooperation between China and the South Pacific island countries will trigger a new Cold War,” he said.

He said that China “has a long history of friendly relations with the South Pacific island countries” and had long provided them economic and technical assistance without any political strings attached.

Like some other countries in the Pacific, Micronesia is finding itself increasingly caught between the competing interests of Washington and Beijing.

Micronesia has close ties to the U.S. through a Compact of Free Association. But it also has what Panuelo describes in his letter as a “Great Friendship” with China that he hopes will continue despite his opposition to the agreement.

The security aspects of the agreement will be particularly troubling to many in the region and beyond, especially after China signed a separate security pact with the Solomon Islands last month.

That pact has raised fears that China could send troops to the island nation or even establish a military base there, not far from Australia. The Solomon Islands and China say there are no plans for a base.

The May 30 meeting will be the second between Wang and the Pacific islands’ foreign ministers after they held a virtual meeting last October.

Those who follow China’s role in the Pacific will be scrutinizing the wording of the draft agreement.

Among its provisions: “China will hold intermediate and high-level police training for Pacific Island countries.”

The agreement says the countries will strengthen “cooperation in the fields of traditional and non-traditional security” and will “expand law enforcement cooperation, jointly combat transnational crime, and establish a dialog mechanism on law enforcement capacity and police cooperation.”

The agreement would also see the nations “expand exchanges between governments, legislatures and political parties.”

The draft agreement also stipulates that the Pacific countries “firmly abide” by the one-China principle, under which Taiwan, a self-ruled island democracy, is considered by Beijing to be part of China. It would also uphold the “non-interference” principle that China often cites as a deterrent to other nations speaking out about its human rights record.

The agreement says that China and the Pacific countries would jointly formulate a marine spatial plan “to optimize the layout of the marine economy, and develop and utilize marine resources rationally, so as to promote a sustainable development of blue economy.”

China also promises more investment in the region by mobilizing private capital and encouraging “more competitive and reputable Chinese enterprises to participate in direct investment in Pacific Island countries.”

China also promised to dispatch Chinese language consultants, teachers and volunteers to the islands.

The AP has also obtained a draft of a five-year action plan that’s intended to sit alongside the Common Development Vision, which outlines a number of immediate incentives that China is offering to the Pacific nations.

In the action plan, China says it will fully implement 2,500 government scholarships through 2025.

“In 2022, China will hold the first training program for young diplomats from Pacific Island countries, depending on the pandemic situation,” the draft plan states, adding that China will also hold seminars on governance and planning for the Pacific nations.

In the draft action plan, China says it will build criminal investigation laboratories as needed by the Pacific nations that can be used for fingerprint testing, forensic autopsies, and electronic forensics.

China also says it will also spend an additional \$2 million and send 200 medics to the islands to help fight COVID-19 and promote health, and promises to help the countries in their efforts to combat climate change.

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HEADLINE	05/25 China defends human rights record
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/25/china/china-xi-jinping-michelle-bachelet-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Chinese President Xi Jinping defended his country's human rights record on Wednesday, telling a visiting UN official there is "no need for 'preachers' to boss around other countries."</p> <p>Xi's remarks, made in a video call with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, are likely to add to the controversy surrounding a trip that critics say risks becoming a propaganda tool for Beijing.</p>

Bachelet, who arrived in China on Monday for a six-day tour, is expected to visit the far-western region of Xinjiang, where the Chinese government faces accusations of mass internment, forced assimilation, forced labor and forced sterilization [against Uyghur and other mostly Muslim minorities](#).

Beijing has repeatedly denied the allegations.

But the trip -- the first by a UN human rights chief to China since 2005 -- has been dogged by questions about Bachelet's access and freedom to speak with locals unsupervised, raising fears it risks the credibility of her office.

On Wednesday, Xi told Bachelet China's human rights development "suits its own national conditions."

"On the issue of human rights, no country is perfect, there is no need for 'preachers' to boss around other countries, still less should they politicize the issue, practice double standards or use it as an excuse to interfere in other countries' internal affairs," Xi was quoted as saying by Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

Bachelet said she committed to the visit because "it is a priority to engage with the Government of China directly, on human rights issues," according to a statement provided to CNN by the OHCHR.

"For development, peace and security to be sustainable -- locally and across borders -- human rights have to be at their core," Bachelet said. "China has a crucial role to play within multilateral institutions in confronting many of the challenges currently facing the world, including threats to international peace and security, instability in the global economic system, inequality, climate change and more."

Neither the CCTV readout of the meeting nor Bachelet's statement mentioned Xinjiang.

Bachelet is expected to visit the cities of Kashgar and Urumqi in Xinjiang, according to China's Foreign Ministry. The ministry said her trip will be conducted in a "closed loop" -- meaning her delegation will be isolated inside a "bubble" to contain the potential spread of [Covid-19](#), and no international journalists will be allowed to travel with her.

"We have no expectation that (China) will grant the necessary access required to conduct a complete, unmanipulated assessment of the human rights environment in Xinjiang," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters Tuesday.

"We think it was a mistake to agree to a visit under the circumstances," Price said, adding that Bachelet would not be able to obtain a full picture "of the atrocities, the crimes against humanity, and genocide" in the region.

In a statement Monday, Amnesty International said Bachelet must "address crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations" during her trip.

"Michelle Bachelet's long-delayed visit to Xinjiang is a critical opportunity to address human rights violations in the region, but it will also be a running battle against Chinese government efforts to cover up the truth," the organization's Secretary-General Agnes Callamard said.

"The UN must take steps to mitigate against this and resist being used to support blatant propaganda."

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HEADLINE	05/24 Russia, China in joint military exercise
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/24/russia-china-military-exercise/
GIST	Russia and China flew strategic bombers over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea while President Biden was in Tokyo on Tuesday, their first joint military exercise since the invasion of Ukraine and a pointed signal to the administration as it seeks to solidify regional alliances amid the growing strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing.

The White House promptly condemned the air exercise. “This ... shows that China continues to be willing to closely align itself with Russia, despite the brutality that Russia is committing in Ukraine,” said a senior Biden administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the matter’s sensitivity.

The two countries have conducted joint exercises before, but “this is the most significant form of cooperation by their militaries” since Feb. 24, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the official said.

The exercise occurred as Biden concluded his five-day trip to Seoul and Tokyo to deepen strategic ties in a series of meetings that also included the leaders of Australia and India. Japan, India, Australia and the United States make up the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad. Although their partnership is considered informal, Beijing views it as a strategic effort to contain China.

Economic and geostrategic concerns were high on Biden’s agenda, with meetings covering a range of issues, including support for Ukraine and announcing a new economic framework intended to act in part as a counterweight to China’s effort to increase its influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan’s defense minister, Nobuo Kishi, said Tokyo expressed “grave concerns” about the flights through diplomatic channels to China and Russia. During a news conference Tuesday, he called the move especially “provocative,” with the Quad meeting taking place simultaneously. It marked the fourth time since November that Chinese and Russian military aircraft have conducted such flights, Kishi said.

“The combined fact that China and Russia were willing to go through this exercise while the Quad meeting was underway in Japan and as events continue to unfold in Ukraine indicates the depth of their partnership and demonstrates that we should only expect it to deepen in the months ahead,” said David O. Shullman, senior director of the Global China Hub at the Atlantic Council.

Russia sought military aid from China, U.S. officials said.

The White House said in March that Russia, hobbled by trade restrictions and other economic sanctions imposed by the United States and a host of countries in response to the invasion of Ukraine, asked China for military equipment. So far, the senior administration official said, there is no evidence that Beijing has provided such assistance.

The 13-hour joint patrol was conducted under the two countries’ annual military cooperation plan, according to the Chinese and Russian defense ministries. It follows a joint statement in February in which Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged that the friendship between the two states had “no limits” and there were “no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”

The senior U.S. official called that statement proof that, whether in Eastern Europe or the Western Pacific, “China and Russia would have their own spheres of influence where it would be natural and acceptable to wield their power against their neighbors.”

“They are working together to advance that vision,” the official said.

Russia’s Ministry of Defense said the exercise was not aimed at third countries and that “there were no violations of the airspace of foreign states” during the exercise, the state-owned media outlet Tass reported Tuesday.

In Seoul, senior military officials said they scrambled warplanes after at least four Chinese and Russian military aircraft flew into South Korea’s air defense zone. Although that area is not part of the country’s territorial airspace, authorities call on foreign planes that enter the zone to identify themselves.

The air patrol was composed of Russian Tu-95MS strategic bombers and Chinese H-6K strategic bombers, according to Russia’s defense ministry. Such exercises take awhile to prepare and was probably planned well in advance, officials said.

	“But they could have chosen not to do it,” said Shullman, of the Atlantic Council. “They knew what message they were sending by choosing to do it today — as opposed to a week ago.”
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HEADLINE	05/24 WHO: monkeypox outbreak ‘containable’
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-05-24/who-monkeypox-outbreak-not-normal-but-containable
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization on Tuesday reported that the monkeypox outbreak, while “not normal,” is still “containable.”</p> <p>"We encourage you all to increase the surveillance of monkeypox to see where transmission levels are and understand where it is going," said Sylvie Briand, WHO director for global infectious hazard preparedness.</p> <p>The organization said that 19 countries where the rare viral disease is not endemic have reported a total of 131 confirmed cases and 106 suspected cases. The majority of the cases have been reported in Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>It added that it is unclear whether the spike in cases was the “tip of the iceberg” or not.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday said that it expects more monkeypox cases. The first U.S. case of 2022 was reported last week in Massachusetts.</p> <p>“Many of these global reports of monkeypox cases are occurring within sexual networks,” Inger Damon of the CDC said in a statement. “However, healthcare providers should be alert to any rash that has features typical of monkeypox. We’re asking the public to contact their healthcare provider if they have a new rash and are concerned about monkeypox.”</p> <p>CDC officials on Monday warned that anyone can get monkeypox but added that a "notable fraction of cases" are occurring among gay and bisexual men.</p> <p>According to WHO, monkeypox is “transmitted from one person to another by close contact with lesions, body fluids, respiratory droplets and contaminated materials such as bedding.” Symptoms include rash, headache, fever, muscle and body aches, swollen lymph nodes and back pain.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Capitol Hill Pride march bans Seattle police
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2022/05/24/police-banned-again-pride-event-seattle-capitol-hill
GIST	<p>The group that runs a Pride march and rally in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood says it once again will ask police to stay away this year.</p> <p>Why it matters: Around the country, organizers of Pride events are reconsidering whether to let police participate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event organizers cite recent police killings of Black Americans, as well as Pride's origins in commemorating the 1969 Stonewall Riots — which began as an uprising against police — as reasons to keep officers out. <p>Flashback: Last year was the first time Capitol Hill Pride banned officers from participating in its events.</p> <p>Context: The group sponsors a rally and march each year in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, which is historically the center of Seattle's LGBTQ community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization began putting on the Capitol Hill event after the Seattle Pride parade moved out of the neighborhood about 15 years ago. This year's event is scheduled for Sunday, June 26 from 10am-8pm.

What they're saying: Leaders of the group said they feel the Seattle Police Department has yet to effectively hold officers accountable for uses of force during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests.

- Charlette LeFevre, founder and director of Capitol Hill Pride, told Axios that discipline has been inadequate in several cases, including one where an officer was found to have [committed no wrongdoing](#) after pepper spraying a 7-year-old and another where an [officer who rolled a bicycle](#) over a protester's head received a seven-day suspension.
- The police department's responses so far "have not improved our confidence in the Seattle police, nor given us just cause to remove our participation ban," Capitol Hill Pride said in a statement shared with Axios.
- " ... We will continue to request police stay respectfully at the perimeters," the statement said.

The other side: Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, didn't immediately respond to a message from Axios on Tuesday morning.

- Last year, however, [Solan said](#) banning Seattle police officers from Pride events was "disgusting, bigoted, discriminatory and contradicts our community's beautiful inclusive LGBTQ message."

Of note: Seattle Pride sponsors the larger Pride parade that runs through downtown Seattle each year.

- Organizers told Axios that they will allow officers to march in the parade this year — and the police department has already invited officers to participate, a spokesperson said.

The bottom line: The fallout from police clashes with protesters in 2020 continues to reverberate, with the renewed ban on officers at Capitol Hill Pride events as just one example.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Monkeypox outbreak waiting to happen
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/monkeypox-outbreak-was-waiting-to-happen-say-scientists
GIST	<p>The unprecedented surge in monkeypox cases in the UK and beyond was an outbreak waiting to happen after the end of global smallpox vaccination more than 40 years ago, scientists say.</p> <p>The UK Health Security Agency announced a further 14 cases in England on Tuesday, bringing the total to 70, and one further patient in Scotland. No cases have been identified in Wales or Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Routine smallpox vaccination wound down in most countries before 1980 when the World Health Assembly declared the disease eradicated. Because the vaccine also protects against monkeypox, the campaign had kept that disease in check too, notably in regions of central and western Africa where the virus is endemic.</p> <p>In the decades since smallpox vaccination ended, the proportion of people protected against monkeypox has fallen substantially, allowing the virus to spread more easily from animals into humans and from person to person, fuelling the risk of a major outbreak.</p> <p>"This outbreak was really waiting to happen," said Dr Romulus Breban, a researcher at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Mathematical modelling by Breban and his team in 2020 found that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, immunity to monkeypox fell from 85% in the early 1980s to 60% in 2012. With declining immunity, monkeypox posed "an ever-increasing threat for health security", he wrote at the time. In 2020 the DRC had more than 4,000 suspected cases and at least 171 deaths.</p> <p>"Our immunity level is almost zero," Breban said. "People aged 50 and above are likely to be immune but the rest of us not, so we are very, very susceptible." He believes the outbreak can be contained and said it was an opportunity to propose vaccination campaigns in countries where the virus is endemic.</p> <p>Until this year only a handful of cases of monkeypox had ever been spotted in the UK, all linked to travel from Nigeria. Since the first UK case of 2022 was announced on 7 May, nearly 300 suspected or confirmed cases have come to light in at least 16 countries.</p>

The surge in cases has raised questions about whether the monkeypox virus has evolved into a more transmissible form. So far scientists have found no evidence for this being the case, but researchers are studying the DNA to see if mutations in the virus may have changed its behaviour. Genetic studies so far suggest the virus matches strains that reached the UK, Singapore and Israel in 2018 and 2019.

Prof David Heymann, a distinguished fellow at Chatham House's global health programme, said the outbreak appeared more of a chance event, with the virus being amplified once it got into a community of men who have sex with men.

Graham Medley, a professor of infectious disease modelling at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said there was unlikely to be the same "explosive growth" of infections into the general population that was witnessed with Covid. But he said the outbreak could continue for several months as contact tracing slows but does not stop transmission.

"As with Covid, we can expect twists and turns as monkeypox outbreaks continue," he said. "At the moment the transmission chains are mostly within sexually active younger men, but there are other settings where there is sufficient contact for monkeypox to spread. The longer the outbreak continues and the higher the prevalence, the more likely that monkeypox will find these other niches."

Researchers in the UK have revealed promising yet tentative signs that an antiviral may help to reduce illness from the virus. In a [study](#) published in the Lancet Infectious Diseases, four of seven patients diagnosed with monkeypox in the UK between 2018 and 2021 were given either brincidofovir or tecovirimat, drugs developed to treat smallpox.

Findings from the three patients given brincidofovir suggest the drug provided little clinical benefit and did not appear to reduce the duration of the illness. However, the one patient treated with tecovirimat had a shorter hospital stay and appeared to shed virus, detected by PCR tests, for a shorter period of time.

Dr Hugh Adler, a co-author of the study at Liverpool university hospitals NHS trust, said that although only one patient was involved, the result for tecovirimat was "a promising signal".

"Now that we're seeing more cases, unexpectedly, we think it's important to share," he said. "This is the sum total of human experience with these drugs and monkeypox so far."

The UK has secured a supply of tecovirimat and is offering a smallpox vaccine to close contacts of people diagnosed with monkeypox to reduce the risk of symptomatic infection and severe illness. Sources suggest an [extra 20,000 doses of the vaccine](#) have been ordered to add to the UK's stock of 5,000.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Ukraine farmers devastated by war
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/ukrainian-farmers-war-food-insecurity-famine
GIST	<p>There was a gruelling artillery duel between Ukrainian and Russian troops, positioned just four kilometres apart. Right in the middle, between the two frontlines, stood Ivan Mishchenko's farmhouse, with his dozens of cows and 100 hectares (247 acres) of wheat fields, transformed into a bloody battleground for five consecutive days in early March.</p> <p>"Two kilometres on the right were the Russian troops, two kilometres on the left were our troops," said Mishchenko, 66, whose farm lies in the countryside around Pochepyn, a small village north of Kyiv.</p> <p>"They were shooting so hard, as if it was some kind of computer game. The first two days I stayed in the house, but then it was so insufferable that I had to leave. When I returned, I was in shock. My house, the warehouse, the barns ... were all destroyed. I lost everything."</p>

Mishchenko, who has livestock and grain fields, is one of hundreds of Ukrainian farmers whose businesses were devastated by a war that has unleashed economic devastation in the country and threatened famine elsewhere. And like other farmers in Ukraine, his few hectares of surviving wheat fields cannot be harvested due to the shortage of fuel in the region and after his harvester and other machinery were destroyed by shelling.

Silos and ports across Ukraine are brimming with more than 20 million metric tonnes of grain and corn that has nowhere to go, with Russia blockading the country's Black Sea coast and the exit routes for Ukraine's grain.

Ukraine used to export most of its goods through seaports but since Russia invaded the country, it has been forced to export by train or via its small Danube River ports. As a result, global wheat prices leaped by 20% in March, owing to the direct impact of the war on wheat production, with the world facing a worsening state of food insecurity and malnutrition, at a time when 42 million people were already one step away from famine.

David Beasley, the executive director of the UN World Food Programme, which feeds 125 million people and buys 50% of its grain from Ukraine, appealed to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin: "If you have any heart at all, please open these ports."

"This is not just about Ukraine," Beasley said last week. "This is about the poorest of the poor who are on the brink of starvation as we speak."

"The war will absolutely cause grain shortage and perhaps hunger," says Mishchenko. "We already have problems, because even those farmers who managed to sow their fields, they simply don't have enough fuel to harvest. Another problem – fertilisers; we used to import them from Russia and Belarus, not enough fertiliser means you harvest 20-30% less."

Before the Russian invasion, Ukraine served as one of the world's leading breadbaskets – exporting roughly 4.5m tonnes of agricultural produce per month through its ports, including 12% of the planet's wheat, 15% of its corn, and half of its sunflower oil.

Last year, Ukraine produced about 33m tonnes of wheat, of which it exported about 20m tonnes, making it the sixth largest exporter globally. This year, with the situation as it stands, according to the satellite analysis company Kayrros, which uses artificial intelligence combined with data from satellites to monitor commodities, the wheat harvest in the country is likely to be down by at least 35% compared with 2021.

"I don't know how to survive," says Mishchenko, who toured the world before the war with a Ukrainian folk choir. "The government doesn't have the money to help us rebuild. All the money goes to the army."

The cannon shots of both Russian and Ukrainian artillery destroyed his warehouse, the shed where he worked the grain and the house where he lived with his wife and son, Roman, 42. At least 20 of his cows were shot, the carcasses still lying inside the stables, which were also destroyed. The livestock that survived the bombings have been reduced to skin and bones after a blast incinerated tons of hay.

The war not only destroyed Mishchenko's business. It also took his son-in-law away from him.

"He volunteered to join the army and was killed defending Marakiv."

Like many other Ukrainian farmers, Mishchenko will have to start rebuilding everything from scratch. A few days ago, he launched a crowdfunder, and is hoping to resume his business as soon as possible.

Mishchenko was one of the first independent growers in Ukraine, after the fall of the Soviet Union. When he bought this piece of land with his wife, back in the early 1990s, all they had was a tiny trailer.

	<p>Today, the trailer is the only structure left standing after shelling, and that's where Mishchenko and his son live today.</p> <p>"Thirty years after I built all this, I am back in that trailer," he said. "All my life – everything I have built with my own hands in these 30 years, was destroyed, in just one moment."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Russia maintains grip on Black Sea
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/snake-island-does-job-of-moskva-as-russia-maintains-grip-on-black-sea
GIST	<p>Fished out of the water, smashed asunder, is a Ukrainian TB2 drone, retrieved in the last couple of days off the coast of Romania and almost certainly a legacy of a bold attempt to retake Snake Island earlier in the month.</p> <p>The previously inconsequential low-lying 17-hectare (42-acre) rock, nearly 30 miles from the coasts of Ukraine and Romania, has become of growing strategic importance as Russia seeks to maintain its blockade of Ukraine's remaining coastline.</p> <p>For all the videos of TB2 drones destroying Russian air defence systems, helicopters and landing craft this month, Ukraine has failed in its attempt to retake the island, memorably lost in the first days of the war when its garrison told the attacking Russian warship to "go fuck yourself".</p> <p>Over the weekend a Togolese-flagged vessel passing near Snake Island was warned by the Russians to "leave the territorial waters of Russia, otherwise weapons will be used", according to the Ukrainian navy. It amounted to "illegally appropriating Ukrainian territory", the navy added.</p> <p>Russia's navy has dominated the Black Sea since the war began, not least because Ukraine had no real maritime force to speak of. It had lost three-quarters or more of its navy during Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014 and its only remaining frigate was deliberately scuttled days after the war started to prevent its capture.</p> <p>However, Russia lost its flagship missile cruiser, the Moskva, in the middle of April to a Neptune cruise missile strike from Ukraine's mainland. The ship had provided air and sea defence capability to the remainder of Russia's Black Sea fleet, consisting of 20 or more warships and submarines.</p> <p>The Moskva had helped capture Snake Island, and without it the Russian fleet was pushed back further from Ukraine's coast (Neptune missiles have a range of up to 200 miles), bringing the island back into play. Russia's determination to hang on to the rock shows it is, in effect, an alternative to the sunken ship.</p> <p>"Think of it as an unsinkable destroyer," said Andy Netherwood, an air defence expert. "If you place a radar and surface-to-air missile systems there, it allows you to dominate the airspace in the northern Black Sea, including the strategically important approach to Odesa."</p> <p>Russia has used its dominance of the Black Sea to launch Kalibr cruise missile attacks on Ukrainian targets, including from submarines. The missiles can have a range of 1,200 miles, able in theory to strike virtually anywhere in Ukraine.</p> <p>But if anything it is the economic aspect that has come to the fore. "In a conflict of attrition and erosion, the ability to maintain an economic blockade can become significant. World war one comes to mind," said Dr Sidharth Kaushal, a naval power expert with the Rusi thinktank, referring to the long English blockade of Germany that is widely believed to have helped bring about the Central powers' eventual collapse towards the end of 1918.</p>

Ukraine, however, is a net exporter of food, particularly grain and sunflower oil. It previously moved [70% of its exports by sea](#), including 99% of its grain deliveries to countries including Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Yemen. Although some grain is now moving by land, it will not be enough.

Discussions have turned to the idea of creating a protective naval convoy for merchant shipping bound for Ukraine, as proposed by Lithuania this week. But while the UK and others are sympathetic, it would require broad international support, including, Royal Navy sources suggested on Tuesday, from China.

It would also require the involvement of Turkey, which closed the straits to all warships – except those returning to their home port – at the end of February, a situation welcomed by Ukraine at the time because it prevented more Russian warships from entering the Black Sea.

Opening the straits would allow limited access for Nato warships, for up to 21 days at a time under the 1936 Montreux convention, but also for Russia – meaning any convoy solution may have to be agreed with Moscow. It would also require a de-mining of the Ukrainian coast, somewhat hastily defended when the war broke out.

Amid such complications, attention remains focused on military solutions. Lloyd Austin, the US defence secretary, said on Monday that Denmark would send to Ukraine a Harpoon cruise missile system, with a similar operational range to the Neptune – the first declared deployment of such a naval system.

That will help keep the Russian warships away from Ukraine's coast, although Moscow's Kilo-class submarines remain able to roam far more freely. Despite the attempts to take back Snake Island and the growing international calls to reopen the Black Sea, Russia's grip on the strategic body of water remains firm.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Ukraine recon teams hunt Russian targets
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/between-the-front-lines-ukrainian-reconnaissance-teams-hunt-russian-targets-11653396646?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>BARVINKOVE, Ukraine—Walls rattled and pieces of plaster fell from the ceiling of a basement converted by Ukrainian troops into a forward outpost. Russian shells hit again and again the crumpled building above. Images on a surveillance monitor, linked to a camera outside in the deserted village, showed plumes of black smoke rising all around the compound.</p> <p>“The Russians are very angry today because yesterday we killed two of their tanks,” said Marian, a platoon leader in the volunteer Carpathian Sich battalion deployed on the front line near the Russian-held Ukrainian city of Izyum. Like most military personnel, he is only allowed to provide his first name.</p> <p>“Every soldier here, ask anyone, their biggest dream is to destroy a Muscovite tank,” he said.</p> <p>This time, soldiers in the village said, they destroyed the Russian tanks by using a re-engineered commercial drone to drop mortar shells on them. The technique is emblematic of the inventive improvisation used by Ukrainian forces in the now three-monthlong war as they face off against Russian units that are usually larger and better armed.</p> <p>Across the line is Russia's elite 4th Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division, with modern T-80 tanks. For the past six weeks, it has tried—and failed—to push past the Ukrainians south of Izyum, a key part of Moscow's efforts to encircle Kyiv's forces in the Donbas region in the east of the country.</p> <p>Now, with Ukrainian reinforcements arriving on this battalion's flanks and U.S.-supplied M777 howitzers providing long-range fire support from the rear, troops are preparing for a counterattack and constantly probing enemy positions. “We are shifting from defense to offense. Forces around us are already moving ahead,” said Rusyn, the Carpathian Sich battalion's deputy commander. “We are getting ready to push them all the way to the border.”</p>

In grinding combat, Russia is making slow progress in some other parts of Donbas, [trying to encircle the small salient around Severodonetsk](#), the capital of the Ukrainian-held part of the Luhansk region, and edging ahead in other sectors of the front. But its advance has been stopped in this area, which used to be the Donbas offensive's main thrust.

When Russian shelling paused around midday, Marian and three other soldiers ran out of the basement and headed to an observation point in the contested area between Ukrainian and Russian positions, hiking up a hill and through thick forest. A Russian unit was recently hit there, and a stump of a Russian soldier's foot was still standing amid the grass. A Ukrainian team was also ambushed in the same spot. A bloodied helmet and a tourniquet shredded by shrapnel were left behind.

Wearing the top of a camouflage ghillie suit, Oleh, a reconnaissance team member who managed a Kyiv cemetery before the war, scanned nearby hills and the valley below, spotting a Russian infantry fighting vehicle and an artillery piece with binoculars. He noted their locations. Birds chirped. Bugs buzzed. Bright-green birch tree leaves glistened in the sun. It was quiet until the team started to move back through the forest, stepping over nettles, broken branches and pieces of twisted metal.

Then, it was spotted. With a whistle, artillery shells started flying overhead, landing in a field some 150 meters away. Some turned out to be duds and didn't explode. The field, as other fields near the village, was pockmarked with dozens and dozens of craters from previous shelling, brown on emerald green. Troops dived, sprawling in the forest, then sprang up and kept moving between salvos.

"The Russians have unlimited ammunition, and so they fire anywhere they please," Oleh said. "We only strike at confirmed targets, when we obtain precise coordinates, either by drones or through reconnaissance."

Both Russian and Ukrainian reconnaissance units venture into this no man's land between the two armies. Marian kept swinging his rifle to the left as he passed clearings in the forest. Earlier this month, Ukrainian forces here ambushed a Russian reconnaissance squad, killing all but one of its members on the spot, soldiers said. The survivor died of his wounds a few hours later, they said.

As the team returned to its base, Marian urged the men not to linger by the entrance. Seconds matter. The other day, one of the soldiers lost a leg when a shell landed just outside, Marian said. Several grotesquely twisted and perforated cars sat on the ground, tires long burned. Marian himself was injured last month when a piece of shrapnel from a tank shell hit his knee, he said. He has since returned to duty after a short spell in the hospital.

Inside the basement, Oleh and other soldiers examined the coordinates of the spotted Russian position on a tablet connected to the Ukrainian military's battlespace management software, plotting the best way to hit it. Other teams prepared for reconnaissance patrols to other observation points, planning ambushes. Air-defense operators with portable missiles rotated in and out of positions.

The soldiers are equipped with Western and Ukrainian-made antitank weapons including Javelin and Stugna missiles. They can also call in long-range artillery and Bayraktar TB2 drones, soldiers said. Unlike in the early days, Russian aircraft—other than the Orlan reconnaissance drones that frequently buzz over the village—rarely fly above Ukrainian positions because several had been shot down in the area, the soldiers said.

"We are not a passive victim hiding in a burrow and just waiting for the enemy to come and get us. We carry out offensive operations and try to destroy the enemy, during the day and during the night," said the outpost's commander, Semen. "It's a very complicated game. As we choose their vulnerable points and hit them, the intensity of their operations has decreased. They don't have enough men, they don't have the morale, and they keep losing the armor that they cannot replace. It's hard for them. They are not idiots and they don't want to die, either."

The stretch of [the front line around Izyum](#) is where Russia concentrated its forces after retreating from Kyiv and the rest of northern Ukraine in late March as President [Vladimir Putin](#) refocused the campaign on seizing the entirety of Donbas. The Russian thrust here was meant to cut key rail and road connections to Ukrainian-held parts of Donbas, and eventually surround and destroy some of Ukraine's best troops.

The Carpathian Sich, a volunteer battalion that emerged after Russian proxies seized parts of Donbas in 2014, came together once again after Russia invaded on Feb. 24, joining the defense of the town of Irpin on the western outskirts of Kyiv. In early April, the unit was quickly moved from Kyiv to stand in the way of Russian troops rolling from Izyum. Most of the battalion's members aren't full-time soldiers.

The battalion is named after the military force of short-lived Carpathian Ukraine, which proclaimed independence in the spring of 1939 in the Transcarpathian region that belonged to Czechoslovakia between the two world wars. Like many such battalions, it has welcomed foreign volunteers in a variety of roles. One of the more senior foreigners is Juris Jurass, who resigned his seat in the Latvian parliament to take up arms in Irpin in March. In addition to combat duties, he is organizing logistics—about half of the battalion's vehicles were donated by supporters in Latvia.

The fighting on the Izyum front has been much tougher than in Irpin, both because the urban terrain near Kyiv favored defenders, and because the Russians have since improved their tactics, the soldiers say.

"They have learned and no longer drive in the big columns that can be hit in bulk. They are much more careful than they used to be, and now operate in small groups," said Rusyn, the deputy battalion commander. The T-80 tanks on this front have sophisticated French optics and thermal-vision systems, unlike the T-72s that make up the backbone of the Russian tank forces, he said.

The battalion suffered significant casualties when it first deployed here, but the situation has improved in recent weeks, Mr. Jurass said.

"At first, it was pretty much tanks against assault rifles. It's a big deal to overcome your fear when you understand the difference between your and your enemy's capabilities, and still hold the line," the Latvian fighter said, his words drowned by the bangs of explosions above the ground. "Now, it's like day and night. Reinforcements are coming left and right. The Western weapons are doing their job. Morale rises once you realize your own strength."

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HEADLINE	05/24 Covid vaccine, drug sales plateau
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-vaccine-and-drug-sales-once-booming-plateau-11653384780?mod=hp_lista_pos5
GIST	<p>The gold rush for drugmakers making Covid-19 vaccines and treatments might be over, as demand plateaus, supplies turn ample and the pandemic evolves.</p> <p>Merck & Co. and Johnson & Johnson are among the companies cutting sales expectations for pandemic products this year as they assess the outlook.</p> <p>Analysts, meantime, are lowering sales estimates for Covid-19 drugs such as Pfizer Inc.'s antiviral Paxlovid, citing softening demand and few new supply deals.</p> <p>The situation marks a new phase in the pandemic, according to analysts, one without the record sales that certain companies such as Pfizer and Moderna Inc. notched just a few months ago.</p> <p>"This year is probably the peak, then going forward, it's going to decline," said Cantor Fitzgerald LP analyst Louise Chen. "The question is how much?"</p>

Among the factors, analysts say, is slowing demand amid sufficient supplies in many countries.

Drug-sales forecasts have dropped partly because vaccinations have helped many people avoid the kinds of illness necessitating drug treatment. In addition, a mutating virus has rendered some drugs obsolete.

Meantime, vaccine sales have slowed now that many governments, which had competed for vaccine contracts to lock in supplies while manufacturers ramped up production, don't need as much with many people vaccinated.

People are also getting boosters at lower rates than they received initial doses, further reducing demand.

Many countries have even refrained from entering into new supply contracts with manufacturers, while they wait to see how often people will need booster shots and whether the shots should be tailored for specific variants.

In the U.S., the Biden administration hasn't been able to win from Congress to date a request for \$22.5 billion in new Covid-19 funding, which would pay for new vaccine contracts.

"The revenue stream was going to go away at some point; it's just going away a little faster—certainly faster than what companies were saying," said Vamil Divan, an analyst at Mizuho Financial Group Inc.

Sales could still exceed expectations if governments begin signing new contracts, severe illnesses pick up or new vaccines are needed, according to analysts.

Forecasts could also increase if the U.S. government, which has been paying for pandemic products, shifts reimbursement to the private sector, which could fetch higher prices.

Analysts say that predicting sales for Covid-19 vaccines and drugs can be especially difficult right now because of uncertainty around how much the medicines will be used in the future, including whether they will be used as much as treatments for managing the flu.

"It's really challenging to predict what demand will look like or how people's behavior will change as this virus continues to evolve," said Carter Gould, an analyst at Barclays PLC.

Some companies are sticking with their forecasts.

Moderna [hasn't adjusted the \\$21 billion in yearly sales](#) for the company's Covid-19 vaccine since raising the estimate in March, though it says sales could wind up higher or lower depending on what the World Health Organization-backed Covax facility and the U.S. government do.

Likewise, Pfizer hasn't changed its forecasts for \$22 billion in Paxlovid and \$32 billion in vaccine sales for 2022.

[JPMorgan Chase](#) & Co. and Barclays, however, have cut their estimates for Pfizer's Paxlovid sales this year, projecting use will lighten and governments won't sign as many new contracts.

JPMorgan trimmed its Paxlovid forecast by about \$5 billion to \$28 billion this year. Barclays cut its 2023 Paxlovid sales estimate to \$9.5 billion from \$10 billion, and the vaccine forecast to \$20 billion from \$23.3 billion.

Pfizer's guidance was based on contracts signed or committed to at the time, and might be updated at the next earnings call, a company spokeswoman said. Pfizer expects [demand for Paxlovid](#) to increase as governments replenish their supplies.

Eli Lilly & Co.'s widely used Covid-19 antibody cocktail ended up being used less than expected when the treatment no longer worked against the mutating virus.

Lilly's combination of bamlanivimab and etesevimab generated \$2.2 billion in sales last year, before the U.S. government restricted administration of the drug in January because it lost effectiveness against Omicron.

Lilly returned to the pandemic market, though, introducing a new antibody, bebtelovimab, which works against Omicron.

The drugmaker has declined to forecast sales for the drug for the rest of the year, however, because of the pandemic's unpredictability and uncertainty over whether the U.S. will buy more, a company spokeswoman said.

GlaxoSmithKline PLC doesn't expect new supply contracts this year for the antibody treatment sotrovimab that it developed with partner Vir Biotechnology Inc. In March, the Food and Drug Administration restricted the drug's use after testing found it to be ineffective against BA.2, now the dominant form of Omicron.

The companies are confident in the drug's long-term role in the pandemic, a Glaxo spokeswoman said.

Merck lowered its yearly sales guidance for the antiviral pill Lagevrio by \$500 million, to between \$5 billion and \$5.5 billion, because the company was working through its agreements with countries, Merck Chief Executive Rob Davis said.

The drug, also known as molnupiravir, "obviously slowed in its growth because the waves of Covid have slowed," he said.

Lagevrio, which Merck sells with partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics LP, had \$3.2 billion in sales during the first quarter. Merck expects half of the drug's remaining sales this year will take place before July.

"What we're simply seeing is governments haven't been contracting yet for a fall wave," said Daina Graybosch, an analyst at SVB Securities LLC.

In April, J&J withdrew its guidance of \$3 billion in sales this year for its Covid-19 vaccine, citing a global surplus of vaccine doses and uncertain demand.

J&J set the vaccine at a not-for-profit price, and decided "it was confusing for investors to not focus on what drives value" for shareholders in other products, Chief Financial Officer Joseph Wolk said.

Analysts expect the vaccine to fetch \$495 million in sales this year, according to FactSet, down from the \$2.4 billion generated last year.

This month, the FDA restricted use of the vaccine to a narrow set of people, citing the risk of a blood-clotting condition.

Other countries including South Africa are sticking with the J&J shot, however, and could return for future contracts. And the WHO has kept its recommendation for use, a spokesman said.

A J&J spokesman said the company's vaccine is playing a crucial role fighting the pandemic, and the company is trying to make supplies available where people are most in need.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Ports brace, early peak shipping season
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/swamped-u-s-seaports-are-bracing-for-an-earlier-peak-shipping-season-11653417720?mod=hp_minor_pos13

America's seaports are stretched to their limit just as retailers and manufacturers are set to begin their seasonal rush of importing ahead of the fall and end-of-year holidays.

With shippers seeking to avoid the risk of delays, this year's peak shipping season is expected to start weeks earlier than usual, at the end of June, just as back-to-school and other seasonal products flood in. That will create high stakes for importers and for the White House as goods arrive against the backdrop of a fragile economy, racing inflation and fresh memories of last year's massive container-ship backups.

The vessel backlogs at the heart of U.S. supply-chain congestion have receded in some places, but reared up in others, including East Coast ports, while other problems that have rippled across logistics networks remain in place. Warehouses are full. Trucking companies and railroads are short workers and equipment. And container yards at ports are jammed with hundreds of thousands of boxes.

At the nation's busiest port complex at Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif., in April, containers sat in yards an average six days before being picked up by truck, and nine days to move by rail, according to the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association.

"When you remember back to the fall of last year—third and fourth quarter—that was our biggest impediment, folks getting their cargo off the docks," said Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles. "We've got to start digging into this backlog pretty quickly."

But around the country, officials at gateways say they are better prepared to deal with the coming import surge after more than a year of juggling clogged docks, vessel backups and record import volumes.

Ports note that they have overhauled operations to better cope with congestion before it gets out of hand. They have extended operating hours to handle more containers and set up pop-up container yards to store overflow boxes. There is better and more frequent communication across the supply-chain—between ocean shipping lines, retailers, truckers, warehouse and third-party logistics operators—so they can anticipate and respond to cargo needs, port officials say.

Despite those assurances, shipping customers are wary—and bracing for more delays.

Three-quarters of shipping industry professionals surveyed by Container xChange, an online marketplace for buying and leasing boxes, said this year's peak season will be as bad or worse than last year's. [Target](#) Corp. executives, during a recent earnings call, forecast \$1 billion of higher-than-expected freight expenses this year amid soaring fuel and shipping costs, and said they don't expect supply-chain pressures to recede until 2023.

But there are signs of a softening in shipping demand. Retailers such as Target and Walmart Inc. are pulling back on some orders as consumer spending shifts from goods to services. Analysts at JPMorgan Chase & Co. in a recent report said they expect restocking to slow, especially in sectors such as home furnishings and electronics that have seen dimming demand.

A slowdown in imports could give ports the breathing room they need.

"I just can't see a big peak season," said Craig Grossgart, senior vice president of global ocean freight for Itasca, Ill.-based freight forwarder Seko Logistics. Container shipping line Ocean Network Express, he said, recently increased Seko's weekly space allocation on vessels by 15%, suggesting there is more room on ships.

Even a gradual increase in container volumes this peak season could present a challenge for ports. Import volumes were up 6.6% at major U.S. ocean gateways during the first quarter compared with the year-ago period, marking the start of a record year, according to research and consulting firm Beacon Economics.

Dozens of container ships are currently waiting to unload at ports on the West, Gulf and East coasts, even though imports have been dampened by a monthslong Covid-19 shutdown in China that depressed output

at some of the country's biggest manufacturing hubs. London-based Drewry Shipping Consultants estimates the expected equivalent of 26 container ships-worth of goods didn't ship from China in April alone.

The backup of container ships at Los Angeles and Long Beach, which came to symbolize supply-chain congestion last year, on Monday fell to 28 vessels, the lowest since Aug. 2, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California. That's down from a high of 109 ships in January—though before the pandemic it was unusual for any ship to have to wait to unload.

Smaller backups have spread to other ports as shippers look for a way around the Southern California congestion.

An average 18 ships a day waited off the coast of the Port of New York and New Jersey last week, according to port data. At the Port of Savannah, Ga., the fourth-largest gateway for seaborne imports, 16 container ships were waiting to unload on Monday, port officials said.

Griff Lynch, executive director of the Georgia Ports Authority, said the Savannah backup was caused by a spike in vessel traffic that coincided with a week in which the port took one of its berths out of operation for a reconstruction project. That suggests there is little slack in cargo operations ahead of the seasonal rush.

Port officials are watching to see if there is a surge of imports once Chinese factories restart production. Gulf and East Coast ports are also bracing for an increase in cargo as shippers divert goods from the West Coast, where monthslong labor talks between dockworkers and cargo-handlers could lead to disruptions.

The talks, which began earlier this month, are expected to run through the summer. Mr. Lynch said East Coast ports are already seeing a combined 10% to 15% bump in cargo headed their way.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Europe accepts Putin's payment demands
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/24/eu-russian-gas-putin-rubles/
GIST	<p>ROME — European energy companies appear to have bent to Russian President Vladimir Putin's demand that they purchase natural gas using an elaborate new payment system, a concession that avoids more gas shut-offs and also gives Putin a public relations victory while continuing to fund his war effort in Ukraine.</p> <p>The system, which involves the creation of two accounts at Gazprombank, enables Europe to say it is technically paying for natural gas in euros, while Russia can say it is receiving payment in rubles — a requirement Putin imposed on “unfriendly” nations.</p> <p>Putin's insistence on rubles may be more about forcing European countries to scramble at his behest than about shoring up his country's currency, some economists and energy experts suspect. European Union countries have been touchy about the notion they might violate their sanctions on Russia, and questions about the arrangement tested European unity, leading to weeks of chaos and contradictory guidance from Brussels. It also got countries talking about how much they still need Russian gas, even as they debate a Russian oil embargo.</p> <p>In the short term, they are willing to jump through some hoops to avoid an energy crisis.</p> <p>But that also means sending money to Russia even as they condemn the Kremlin-launched war, sanction oligarchs and supply weapons to Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia had already used strict capital controls and a massive interest rate hike to stabilize the ruble. With Europe now signaling that it will use the payment system as bills come due this week, the currency is strengthening all the more.</p>

Under the new billing system, gas payments will continue to be invoiced and sent in euros. The noteworthy change is that Russia will then take the money from the European energy company's euro account, convert the euros into rubles, transfer the money into a special ruble account also belonging to the energy company, and then take the money once and for all.

"This is a transaction where everybody saves face," said Alessandro Lanza, a professor at Rome's LUISS University and a former economist at Eni, Italy's major energy company.

A broad European refusal to adjust its payment terms to Gazprom, the Russian state-owned energy giant, would have pushed prices even higher for consumers and potentially led to rationing measures across the bloc. Two European Union members — Poland and Bulgaria — had their supplies [cut in late April](#) by Gazprom after refusing to go along with the new system, in what Poland's prime minister called a "direct attack." Finland this week was subject to a similar cutoff, as retaliation for its NATO application.

But most European countries have appeared to go a different route, moving away from rhetoric about refusing to be blackmailed and making peace with an arrangement based on the technicalities.

"Timely payment for the received gas deliveries from Russia is ensured," said a statement from OMV, the Austrian oil-and-gas company.

Along the way, many European policymakers have been confused about the arrangement — both the fine points and whether Russia might stand to gain anything meaningful. As such, the European Union's own guidance on how countries should proceed has been vague.

As recently as last week, Eric Mamer, the European Commission's chief spokesman, said opening an account for rubles would constitute a breach of sanctions.

A day later, Paolo Gentiloni, Europe's economic minister, seemed to give the new payment scheme an all-clear. Paying in rubles would constitute a sanctions violation. "But this is not what is happening," he said. In recent interviews, Italian officials familiar with the deal say they believe there are clear reasons the new arrangement does not breach European sanctions. While Europe has prohibited all transactions with Russia's central bank, the conversion process does not involve the central bank — something Eni has received assurances of in writing, according to one person familiar with the deal who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about it publicly. That person said that even if a European company were to pay directly in rubles, it would not violate sanctions.

"The ruble itself is not sanctioned," the person said.

In theory, a strengthening currency gives Russians more buying power abroad — a big advantage in normal times. But that advantage is diminished because Russians have become so isolated amid the war from the global financial system.

While Eni said directly that it was opening an account for the ruble conversion, OMV said more vaguely that it was opening a "conversion account." The company wouldn't comment when asked if the account was for rubles.

Uniper, a Germany-based energy company, said in a statement: "We opened the necessary account at Gazprom bank in Russia ... but will continue to pay in euros in line with the new payment mechanism."

Alexander Novak, Russia's deputy prime minister, said last week that "about half" of Gazprom's 54 foreign clients have opened ruble accounts. An [account](#) of Novak's comments from the Tass news agency did not say how many of those 54 were from countries considered adversarial.

Roberto Perotti, an economist at Bocconi University in Milan, said there appears to be only "political value" in forcing European companies to open a ruble account, with Putin proving that he can set the terms with E.U. nations. Russia, he said, could have ended up with an identical bottom line by accepting the

	<p>euros and converting them on the exchange market. But such a transaction would have gotten scant public attention.</p> <p>Without immediate and sharp cuts to its energy supply, Europe has bought itself some time to ramp up its storage for peak demand periods next winter.</p> <p>There is still a chance that the Kremlin could retaliate. The draft conclusions compiled for an upcoming European Council summit suggest countries will agree to prepare for the possibility of “major supply disruptions.” That would mean bolstering procurement from other non-E.U. countries and also creating deals to share supplies within the bloc.</p> <p>Europe has tried to wean its dependence on Russian fossil fuels, first with an embargo of coal. A more ambitious plan to phase out oil imports, while supported by most E.U. nations, has so far been held up by countries that remain dependent on Russian oil, most notably Hungary.</p> <p>Gas is the most significant question looming for the continent because 40 percent of the gas burned in Europe comes from Russia. The European Union has said it is committed to reducing Russian gas by two-thirds by the end of the year, but it has not followed the United States in creating an outright ban on imports.</p> <p>At least in the short term, said Alessandro Pozzi, an equities analyst at Mediobanca who follows the energy industry, “Europe will likely have to continue paying Putin for his gas.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Ukraine war raises famine fears
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/europe/russia-ukraine-food-supply.html
GIST	<p>DAVOS, Switzerland — Fears of a global food crisis are swelling as Russian attacks on Ukraine’s ability to produce and export grain have choked off one of the world’s breadbaskets, fueling charges that President Vladimir V. Putin is using food as a powerful new weapon in his three-month-old war.</p> <p>World leaders called on Tuesday for international action to deliver 20 million tons of grain now trapped in Ukraine, predicting that the alternative could be hunger in some countries and political unrest in others, in what could be the gravest global repercussion yet of Russia’s assault on its neighbor. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where worries about the war’s consequences have eclipsed almost every other issue, speakers reached for apocalyptic language to describe the threat.</p> <p>“It’s a perfect storm within a perfect storm,” said David Beasley, the executive director of the World Food Program, a United Nations agency. Calling the situation “absolutely critical,” he warned, “We will have famines around the world.”</p> <p>The world’s food distribution network was already strained by pandemic-related disruptions, and exports from Ukraine, ordinarily among the world’s biggest suppliers, have plummeted because of the war. Russia has seized some the country’s Black Sea ports and blockaded the rest, trapping cargo vessels laden with corn, wheat, sunflower seeds, barley and oats.</p> <p>Russian forces have taken control of some of Ukraine’s most productive farmland, destroyed Ukrainian infrastructure that is vital to raising and shipping grain, and littered farm fields with explosives. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Union’s executive branch, told the political and business leaders gathered in Davos that Russia — an even bigger exporter — had confiscated Ukrainian grain stocks and agricultural machinery.</p> <p>“On top of this,” she said, “Russia is now hoarding its own food exports as a form of blackmail, holding back supplies to increase global prices, or trading wheat in exchange for political support.”</p>

The fighting in Ukraine is increasingly concentrated in a small pocket of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, where Russia's battered forces are making slow, bloody progress as they try to encircle the strategically important city of Sievierodonetsk, the easternmost Ukrainian stronghold.

Within the city, once an industrial hub, the devastation from Russian artillery is evident on every street in the form of shattered buildings, burned-out vehicles and cratered pavement. Russian pincers approaching the city from the north and south are separated by just 16 miles, but face "strong Ukrainian resistance," the British Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

Three months into the war, the United States and its allies have shown remarkable solidarity so far in supporting Ukraine with weapons and other aid, and in punishing Russia with economic sanctions, but the limits of that unity are being tested. Finland and Sweden have signaled that they want to abandon their long-held neutrality to join NATO, but that plan is being held up by one member country, Turkey. At the same time, Hungary is blocking an E.U. plan to embargo imports of Russian oil.

Within both blocs, officials have offered assurances, without specifics, that the roadblocks will soon be overcome. Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary general, said Tuesday that he was confident Sweden and Finland would join the alliance, though "I cannot tell you exactly how and when." Diplomats from the two Nordic countries traveled to Turkey for talks on the issue.

The European Union, heavily dependent on Russian fuels, has already agreed to a phased embargo on natural gas from Russia, and the head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, warned that Europe could face gas rationing next winter.

"I'm advising several European governments to prepare a contingency plan," Mr. Birol said at Davos. He added that "Europe is paying for its over-dependence on Russian energy."

Ukraine has applied to join the European Union, and on Tuesday its government rejected a French proposal for something short of full membership. Russia has vehemently opposed any expansion of NATO and E.U. membership for Ukraine, but its aggression has backfired, making those associations more attractive to its neighbors.

Increasingly isolated, the Kremlin has looked to Beijing for support, and Russia held joint military maneuvers on Tuesday with China, their first since the war in Ukraine began. The show of force included bomber flights over the Sea of Japan, while President Biden was not far away, in Tokyo, for meetings with world leaders.

But the food crisis took center stage at Davos, where President Andrzej Duda of Poland warned that famine in Africa and elsewhere would prompt a flood of migration to Europe, where searing memories are fresh of the 2015-2016 migration wave that strained E.U. unity and empowered xenophobic nationalist movements.

Ukraine and Russia ordinarily account for about one-quarter of the grain traded internationally; in recent years, Ukraine had exported an average of about 3.5 million tons of per month. In March, only 300,000 tons were shipped out, though exports rebounded somewhat to more than a million tons in April and could reach 1.5 million tons in May, said Roman Slaston, the chief of Ukraine's agricultural industry group.

Ukraine's agriculture ministry says that the Black Sea blockade has prevented 14 million tons of corn, 7 million tons of wheat and 3 million tons of sunflower seeds from reaching world markets. Ukrainian officials have accused Moscow of stealing Ukraine's produce and then selling it abroad as Russian.

Western officials are circulating proposals for getting grain out of Ukraine, such as having multiple countries send warships to escort cargo ships from Ukrainian ports and run the blockade, but that runs the danger of a shooting confrontation with Russian vessels. Sending ships from NATO countries is considered particularly risky — like the rejected idea of having NATO members enforce a no-fly zone to

keep Russian warplanes away from Ukraine — so much of the talk has been about countries outside the alliance taking part.

But Mr. Stoltenberg, the NATO chief, warned that breaking the Black Sea blockade would be very hard.

“Is it possible to get it out on ships? That is a difficult task. It’s not an easy way forward,” he said.

Ukraine has continued to ship grain overland through Europe, and work is underway to expand such routes, Ms. von der Leyen and Mr. Slaston said — but doing so on a scale great enough to replace seagoing shipment would be very difficult. The railways in Eastern Europe use different gauges, which means switching equipment when going long distances, and many of Ukraine’s railroads, highways and bridges have been damaged by Russian attacks.

One farmer said he lost 50 rail cars full of grain when his cargo got stranded between Russian airstrikes in front of and behind the train.

But the problem is not limited to shipping — farming, itself, has been greatly diminished by the war. In some places, fighting has simply made the work too dangerous. In others, Russian strikes on fuel depots have left farmers unable to power their tractors.

Farmers accuse Russian forces of regularly targeting their grain silos and seizing their grain stores, particularly in the south.

And perhaps most frightening are the countless mines left by retreating Russian forces, especially in the north. The Ukrainian Deminers Association, a group that locates and removes explosives, says nearly 45 percent of the fields it has inspected in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions were mined.

Gordie Siebring, a farmer based near the Belarusian border, said Ukrainian military authorities warned him he could not sow the fields closest to the frontier because of the mine threat, meaning he has been unable to plant 8 to 10 percent of his field. Neighboring farmers have it much worse, he said, because Russian mines have made over two-thirds of their fields too dangerous to use.

“If they are as close as 10 to 15 kilometers away, they can launch mines with artillery,” he said. “These mines have small parachutes and land in the fields and have sensors that cause detonation later. Those are really causing havoc.”

Another threat to global supplies, experts say, is that countries will hoard their own food stocks. Robert Habeck, the vice chancellor and minister of economic affairs of Germany, said countries should curb their use of grain to make biofuel and to feed livestock.

“Markets have to stay open,” Mr. Habeck said in an interview. “The worst thing that can happen now is that every country cares for its own supply, saves all the wheat, saves all the food, and does not give it to the market, because then we have no chance of securing the food supply.”

Before the war, droughts in North America and the Horn of Africa, poor harvests in China and France, and the pandemic were already squeezing food supplies, leaving the world uncommonly vulnerable. By December, global wheat prices had risen about 80 percent in a little over a year, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Even before Russian tanks rolled across Ukraine’s border, experts were warning of “a massive surge in food insecurity and the threat of famine,” said Adam Tooze, director of the European Institute at Columbia University.

The war, he said, is “impacting an incredibly fragile food system.”

	<p>At the same time, the spike in oil and gas prices caused by the war has triggered an even sharper increase in the cost of fertilizers made in part from those fuels.</p> <p>Ms. von der Leyen said E.U. countries were increasing their own grain production and working with the World Food Program to ship available stocks to vulnerable countries at affordable prices.</p> <p>“Global cooperation is the antidote to Russia’s blackmail,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/25 Minneapolis police, change comes slowly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/minneapolis-police-george-floyd-anniversary.html
GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS — It was a searing example of a police department hitting rock bottom: a veteran police officer murdered George Floyd, a Black man, on a busy street in broad daylight and set off racial justice protests around the globe. Minneapolis promised to set an example. “Changing the world starts here,” Mayor Jacob Frey wrote in an opinion essay.</p> <p>In the two years since, the mayor has ordered a host of policy changes to rein in the police, including banning chokeholds, restricting no-knock warrants and traffic stops and stepping up discipline for misconduct.</p> <p>But the department has repeatedly been caught violating the mayor’s edicts — killing a man in a no-knock raid, using “warrior-style” training for recruits and, according to a new investigation, escalating encounters with the public to the point that the use of force is required.</p> <p>Even as it tries to remake its police force, the city is grappling with the same crime spike as the rest of the country — violent crime in Minneapolis is up 36 percent this year over the same period in 2019 — and is combating it with an officer corps depleted by the coronavirus pandemic and low morale.</p> <p>A mass exodus has brought the force from 881 officers before Mr. Floyd’s death down to 580, with applicants drying up. Scores of retiring officers have filed disability claims for post-traumatic stress disorder, receiving payouts averaging about \$170,000 and suggesting that the department’s PTSD rate rivals that of Iraq war veterans.</p> <p>Promises to increase accountability for officers who engage in misconduct have yet to produce visible results. In March — after officials had repeatedly vowed to dismantle police union protections for accused officers — the city approved a contract that raised officer pay but scarcely altered the disciplinary process.</p> <p>In 2020 and 2021, 68 officers left the force while disciplinary action was pending against them, effectively closing those cases before they became public and leaving the city open to charges that it was doing little to punish officers who seemed to be targeting journalists and peaceful demonstrators in the protests that followed Mr. Floyd’s death.</p> <p>The department has become a living testament to the difficulty of meaningful change, even of the symbolic kind — the Third Precinct building, set ablaze during the unrest of 2020, remains an unoccupied shell surrounded by razor wire, its fate undetermined.</p> <p>Mayor Frey promised that the city would do more, but said it had run up against officer protections enshrined in state law and the difficulty of eradicating long-held attitudes on the police force. The city says more officers have been disciplined in the past two years than in the previous four.</p> <p>“I’d put our record in terms of change and reform up against most any other,” Mr. Frey said. “Now, that doesn’t change the culture, though.”</p>

The interim police chief, Amelia Huffman, who has been on the job since mid-January, said she was overhauling academy training, rewriting the disciplinary code, revamping the field training officer program and planning an added layer of review when officers use force.

“The only thing that really is holding me back from doing that immediately is staffing,” she said. “To create something new now means taking people from either the street or investigations.”

Many community members said they have grown disillusioned with local efforts at a policing overhaul and were awaiting the outcome of an investigation by the U.S. Justice Department, which is expected to lead to a consent decree that would force the Police Department to enact changes, such as correcting racial disparities and excessive use of force, under court supervision. The Minnesota Department of Human Rights, which conducted its own investigation of the department, also plans to seek a consent decree.

The state investigation found a current of racism and disrespect for the public that it said continued well after Mr. Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020, when he was handcuffed and pinned to the ground under the knee of Officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, for more than nine minutes. Three other officers were on the scene, two of whom helped hold Mr. Floyd down.

For nearly a year afterward, despite pledges to end race-based policing, the department used covert social media accounts to surveil Black leaders in the city, the investigation found. At the police academy last year, trainers used racist tropes in training exercises and eliminated existing lessons about dealing with communities of color, the investigation found.

As protests broke out in the city in the days after Mr. Floyd’s murder, two officers were caught on camera punching and kicking a prone Black man. None of the other officers present appeared to intervene.

Perhaps no other case has captured the shortfall between promises and outcomes more poignantly than that of Amir Locke, a 22-year-old Black man who was shot to death by a Minneapolis police officer in February during a no-knock raid — conducted in search of another man — in the early morning. Mr. Locke was asleep on the couch with a handgun.

During his re-election campaign last year, Mr. Frey claimed to have banned the use of no-knock warrants, which allow the police to make such entries unannounced. In the public outcry over Mr. Locke’s death, it turned out that the mayor had not barred officers from obtaining no-knock warrants but had begun requiring them to announce themselves before entering even if they had one. The video of the Locke shooting showed officers calling out “Police!” as they crossed the threshold.

After the shooting, the mayor revamped the no-knock raid policy yet again, this time requiring a 20- to 30-second waiting period before entry that makes it one of the most restrictive in the country, according to DeRay Mckesson, the executive director of Campaign Zero, a group focused on reducing police violence, which helped craft that policy and others.

Karen Wells, Mr. Locke’s mother, said she had taken her son years ago to a rally in Minneapolis for Trayvon Martin, whose death after being shot by a neighborhood watch captain in Florida in 2012 birthed the Black Lives Matter movement.

She said she had spent years drilling lessons into her sons about how to interact with the police: Don’t wear your pants in a saggy fashion; always have money in your pocket, so no one can accuse you of stealing; keep your hands on the wheel and be polite if you are pulled over.

But a decade after Trayvon Martin’s death, she said, the streets of Minneapolis were filled with people protesting her son’s death at the hands of a Police Department that had promised to do things differently.

Her son, she said, “is now the face of the lack of police reform.”

Nekima Levy Armstrong, a civil rights lawyer who co-chairs the mayor's Community Safety Workgroup, all but offered her resignation at a news conference after Mr. Locke's death. "What we are seeing is business as usual," she said then.

Since then, she has continued with the group, saying she would not abandon work she has done for years just because others are not following through. She said she never expected change to happen quickly.

"I haven't seen that many police departments that suddenly get their act together after a major incident happens," she said. "That might be the expectation, but I don't understand that expectation, with how these police departments have operated."

On a recent Friday night, Officers Maiya Cain, 25, and Elise Hinderliter, 27, answered a call to a residential building in downtown Minneapolis. A 12-year-old boy stood at the lobby door, urging them to hurry.

He had shot his 10-year-old brother in the chest with his father's gun, apparently by accident. Officer Hinderliter, an emergency medical technician, patched the wound and tried to revive the boy, then rode in an ambulance with him to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The older brother huddled in a chair in the apartment lobby, moaning and clutching at his forehead.

Though not a street crime, the shooting was part of a wave of gun violence that has swept Minneapolis and many other cities over the past two years, shifting public attention away from overhauling the police.

Still, the two officers said they had attended trainings in de-escalation and handling people with mental health or drug-related issues since Mr. Floyd's death. Their computer screen showed another change: some calls were marked "B.C.R.," for behavioral crisis response, an alternative to police intervention that the city has been piloting.

The department has been criticized for the paramilitary structure of its training program on the grounds that it discourages officers from questioning misconduct by other officers. But Officer Hinderliter had a different take: "I think that it's structured in a way that sometimes you need to learn to be respectful and humble in this job, because you have a lot of power."

Minneapolis is the most scrutinized city to try to rein in policing after Mr. Floyd's death, but far from the only one. States have passed laws that require de-escalation training, body-worn cameras or early warning systems to identify problem officers. At least six states and four cities have limited the use of no-knock warrants. Dozens of police departments have adopted limits on chokeholds and neck restraints — dangerous subdual tactics that have resulted in fatalities.

But police unions and some law enforcement leaders have resisted changes that they say would weaken their ability to retain officers and fight crime. Rising violence across the country has increased their leverage. Law enforcement objections helped roll back measures, passed by Washington State in the wake of Mr. Floyd's death, to improve police accountability and restrict the use of force, and stalled a bill in Minnesota that would have required officers with PTSD to try treatment before being awarded a disability pension.

In Aurora, Colo., where Elijah McClain died after a violent encounter with the police and the department is under state oversight because of a history of racist policing, the change-minded police chief blamed opposition from the union when she was fired.

The challenges have come at the federal level, too, as a bill named after Mr. Floyd that would have limited the use of chokeholds and no-knock warrants by federal agents and stepped-up discipline for police misconduct failed in Congress last year — torpedoed by both law enforcement objections and proponents who had wanted it to do more.

President Biden was expected to sign an executive order on policing on Wednesday, the two-year anniversary of Mr. Floyd's death, that directs federal law enforcement agencies to revise their use-of-force policies and creates a national registry for officers who have committed misconduct.

But Minneapolis residents said there was still a deep disconnect between officers and the community. Many complain that officers often fail to respond to calls or refuse to take action when they do. And there is a widespread sense that officers still mistreat people with impunity.

Alicia D. Smith is the executive director of the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization in south Minneapolis, which fields a team of violence interrupters, among other services. She envisioned a scenario in which the community could fire officers who were repeat offenders, and rookies spent a year working in community centers, parks and schools before they put on a badge and gun.

"The progress will come from a literal overhaul by community of what the police look like right now and who is in the rank and file," she said.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Nuclear deterrence at risk: aging forces
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/24/nuclear-deterrence-risk-aging-strategic-forces-and/
GIST	<p>U.S. strategic missiles, bombers and submarines are old and operating beyond their technical life expectancies, and replacements and upgraded warheads are needed urgently to deter growing nuclear threats from China, Russia and North Korea, according to military and defense officials.</p> <p>"We don't have any margin left to delay programs," Air Force Lt. Gen. James C. Dawkins Jr., the deputy chief of staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration at the Pentagon, said in a recent congressional hearing.</p> <p>Gen. Dawkins and other nuclear officials told lawmakers reviewing a Pentagon request for \$634 billion over 10 years for weapon and warhead system upgrades that any delays in overdue strategic modernization could result in an undermining of nuclear deterrence that has kept the peace for more than 50 years.</p> <p>Detering a nuclear attack on Americans and U.S. allies has not changed in the past decade, but the threats from adversaries and new technologies have increased, the general testified during the May 17 hearing of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.</p> <p>"Failure to adapt to a changing world is not an option; every operational plan and capability in the Department of Defense rests on the foundation of strategic nuclear deterrence. The stakes could not be higher," Gen. Dawkins said.</p> <p>Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Navy strategic weapons systems, testified during the same hearing that Ohio-class nuclear missile systems armed with nuclear-tipped Trident D-5 missiles comprise 70 percent of the nation's operationally-deployed nuclear warheads, but are currently operating beyond their life expectancy.</p> <p>Years of delays in replacing the submarines with new Columbia-class missile submarines are "increasing concerns about mission effectiveness, reliability and availability," Vice Adm. Wolfe said in prepared testimony.</p> <p>"Replacement programs are ongoing, but there is little or no margin between the end of useful life of existing programs and the fielding of their replacements," said the admiral, who alerted lawmakers that strategic forces "age out" and must be replaced.</p> <p>"We're not asking to go put exquisite new systems in place," he said. "We're just asking to modernize what we've got today because, over the last 50-plus years, it has proven it works. But it's got to be reliable and credible because it's not about what we believe, it's what Russia and China believe. And</p>

the day they believe that our systems don't work and they're not credible is the day that they may ask the question, 'Is today the day?' So, that's exactly why we're asking to modernize what we've got, not increase, not grow numbers."

Gen. Dawkins also told lawmakers that the credibility of nuclear deterrence is degraded if weapons and delivery platforms are unreliable or inaccurate.

U.S. advantages in conventional military power, space systems and cyber weapons also can be "negated" once adversaries perceive they have a nuclear advantage and escalate a conflict to gain the advantage, he said.

"For far too long, we have deferred our nation's nuclear modernization and cannot do so any longer," Gen. Dawkins said, adding that efforts to build new bombers, missiles, and a new air-launched nuclear missiles "are already late to need and have little to zero schedule margin."

"It is not a choice between replacing these platforms and keeping them," he said. "It has become a choice between replacing them or losing them entirely."

The Air Force is replacing the entire Minuteman III ICBM force that is over 56 years old with a new missile called the LGM-35A Sentinel missiles. The first Sentinels will be deployed in 2027 with full deployment by 2036.

The Sentinel will be armed with older W87, 300-kiloton yield warheads until an upgraded W87-1 warhead is added in the future. The newer warhead has been delayed because of limited production facilities for warhead pits.

New B-21 Raider bombers will be deployed "in the very near future," according to Gen. Dawkins, who said the bombers will be armed with a new long-range, stand-off missile that will replace aging nuclear-tipped air-launched cruise missiles.

The first B-21 was ground-tested in March. The B-21 will operate with older B-52s bombers that are being upgraded with new engines and communications systems.

Gen. Dawkins said the new stand-off missile is the first new nuclear missile since the 1980s and is "more critical than ever that the LRSO program remains funded and on schedule."

The Air Force also has begun converting weapons storage areas for warheads and nuclear bombs to upgraded "weapons generation facilities" at ICBM bases and a bomber base.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs Deborah G. Rosenblum testified during the May 17 hearing that five aging warheads are being modernized, including the W88, B61, W80, W87 and W93 warheads.

The Trident D5 missile will undergo two modernizations.

"I cannot overstate the importance of ensuring the successful execution of key programs and the development and funding of plans to continue to ensure that the United States retains a safe, secure, and effective deterrent," Ms. Rosenblum testified.

Jill Hruby, the undersecretary for nuclear security at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), also warned that delays in funding could undermine needed nuclear modernization.

"NNSA is fully aware that delivering the deterrent and capabilities our nation needs to respond to the current environment requires a faster pace and a more complete modernization of weapons than over the last several decades," Ms. Hruby told lawmakers.

NNSA's budget request for nuclear weapons in fiscal 2023 is \$16.5 billion.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy John Plumb, who also testified during the hearing, defended the Biden administration's decision to cancel a new nuclear-armed submarine-launched ballistic and to retire the nuclear B83 earth-penetrating gravity bomb.

The bomb is "of increasingly limited value," he said.

Rep. Doug Lamborn said the administration should keep the B83 until another weapon can be deployed for use against hardened underground targets. "Right now, [the B83] is a better solution than anything else out there on the table in our arsenal," Mr. Lamborn said.

Gen. Dawkins, meanwhile, said that for the first time in history the United States is facing two nuclear-armed adversaries, China and Russia.

China poses the largest long-term threat to the United States with large increases in both conventional and nuclear forces.

Chinese forces will have at least 1,000 warheads by 2030 and are modernizing and expanding a nuclear triad of missiles, bombers and submarines, including three new ICBM fields in western China.

"The PRC's nuclear breakout is deeply concerning," Gen. Dawkins said, referring to the People's Republic of China. "These capabilities will embolden Chinese leaders to leverage their nuclear forces to achieve Chinese political objectives, such as coercing other states — including U.S. allies — or threatening U.S. assets and interests across Asia and the Pacific."

The buildup is unconstrained by any arms control agreement, and "none are expected to be negotiated anytime in the near future," he said.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Mariupol workers unearth more horrors
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/24/workers-mariupol-ukraine-unearth-more-horrors/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Workers digging through the rubble of an apartment building in Mariupol found 200 bodies in the basement, Ukrainian authorities said Tuesday, as more horrors come to light in the ruined city that has seen some of the worst suffering of the 3-month-old war.</p> <p>The bodies were decomposing and the stench hung over the neighborhood, said Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the mayor. He did not say when they were discovered, but the sheer number of victims makes it one of the deadliest known attacks of the war.</p> <p>Heavy fighting, meanwhile, was reported in the Donbas, the eastern industrial heartland that Moscow's forces are intent on seizing. Russian troops took over an industrial town that hosts a thermal power station, and intensified efforts to encircle and capture Sievierodonetsk and other cities.</p> <p>Twelve people were killed by Russian shelling in the Donetsk region of the Donbas, according to the regional governor. And the governor of the Luhansk region of the Donbas said the area is facing its "most difficult time" in the eight years since separatist fighting erupted there.</p> <p>"The Russians are advancing in all directions at the same time. They brought over an insane number of fighters and equipment," the governor, Serhii Haidai, wrote on Telegram. "The invaders are killing our cities, destroying everything around." He added that Luhansk is becoming "like Mariupol."</p> <p>Mariupol was relentlessly pounded during a nearly three-month siege that ended last week after some 2,500 Ukrainian fighters abandoned a steel plant where they had made their stand. Russian forces already</p>

held the rest of the city, where an estimated 100,000 people remain out a prewar population of 450,000, many of them trapped during the encirclement with little food, water, heat or electricity.

At least 21,000 people were killed in the siege, according to Ukrainian authorities, who have accused Russia of trying to cover up the horrors by bringing in mobile cremation equipment and by burying the dead in mass graves.

During the assault on Mariupol, Russian airstrikes hit a maternity hospital and a theater where civilians were taking shelter. An Associated Press investigation found that close to 600 people died in the theater attack, double the figure estimated by Ukrainian authorities.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the Russians of waging “total war” and seeking to inflict as much death and destruction as possible on his country.

“Indeed, there has not been such a war on the European continent for 77 years,” Zelensky said, referring to end of World War II.

Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in the Donbas for eight years and hold large swaths of territory. Sievierodonetsk and neighboring cities are the only part of the Donbas’ Luhansk region still under Ukrainian government control.

Russian forces have achieved “some localized successes” despite strong Ukrainian resistance along dug-in positions, British military authorities said.

Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces in the region are facing a difficult situation.

“Practically the full might of the Russian army, whatever they have left, is being thrown at the offensive there,” Zelenskyy said late Tuesday in his nightly address to the nation. “Liman, Popasna, Sievierodonetsk, Slaviansk – the occupiers want to destroy everything there.”

In the Donetsk region, Moscow’s troops took over the industrial town of Svitlodarsk, which hosts a thermal power station and had a prewar population of about 11,000, and raised the Russian flag there.

“They have now hung their rag on the local administration building,” Serhii Goshko, the head of the local Ukrainian military administration, told Ukraine’s Vilny Radio, in a reference to the Russian flag. Goshko said armed units were patrolling Svitlodarsk’s streets, checking residents’ documents.

Russian troops also shelled the eastern city of Slovyansk with cluster munitions, hitting a private building, according to Mayor Vadym Lyakh. He said casualties were avoided because many people had already left their homes, and he urged the remaining residents to evacuate west. Heavy fighting was also underway in the city of Lyman.

Amid the fighting, two top Russian officials appeared to acknowledge that Moscow’s advance has been slower than expected, though they vowed the offensive would achieve its goals.

Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia’s Security Council. said the Russian government “is not chasing deadlines.” And Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told a meeting of a Russia-led security alliance of former Soviet states that Moscow is deliberately slowing down its offensive to allow residents of encircled cities to evacuate – though forces have repeatedly hit civilian targets.

Hours later, Zelenskyy mocked Shoigu’s assertion.

“Well, after three months of searching for an explanation for why they were unable to break Ukraine in three days, they couldn’t think of anything better than to say that’s what they planned,” he said in his video address.

Russian officials also announced that Moscow's forces had finished clearing mines from the waters off Mariupol and that a safe corridor will open Wednesday for the exit of as many as 70 foreign ships from Ukraine's southern coast.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, there were signs of recovery after weeks of bombardment. Residents formed long lines to receive rations of flour, pasta, sugar and others staples this week. Moscow's forces withdrew from around Kharkiv earlier this month, pulling back toward the Russian border in the face of Ukrainian counterattacks, though Russia continues to shell the area from afar, Ukrainian officials said Tuesday.

Galina Kolembed, the aid distribution center coordinator, said that more and more people are returning to the city. Kolembed said the center is providing food to over 1,000 people every day, a number that keeps growing.

"Many of them have small kids, and they spend their money on the kids, so they need some support with food," she said.

Meanwhile, the wife of the top commander who held out inside the Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol said Tuesday that she had a brief telephone conversation with her husband, who surrendered to the Russians and was taken prisoner last week.

Kateryna Prokopenko, who is married to Azov Regiment leader Denys Prokopenko, said the call broke off before he could say anything about himself.

She said the call was made possible under an agreement between Ukraine and Russia, mediated by the Red Cross.

Prokopenko and Yuliia Fedosiuk, the wife of another soldier, said several families received calls in the past two days. The women said they are hopeful the soldiers will not be tortured and will eventually "come back home."

Denis Pushilin, the leader of the Moscow-backed separatists in the Donetsk region, told the Russian Interfax agency that preparations are underway for a trial of captured Ukrainian soldiers, including the Mariupol defenders.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Disbelief, potent rage over gun violence
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/24/texas-school-shooting-uvalde-gun-violence
GIST	<p>The second US mass shooting in 10 days, which left 18 young children and three adults dead at a Texas elementary school on Tuesday, led to an outpouring of disbelief and potent rage at America's persistent failure to tackle its epidemic of gun violence.</p> <p>Tuesday's horrifying attack in Uvalde, a small, largely Hispanic community outside San Antonio, came just 10 days after the events in Buffalo, New York. There 10 grocery shoppers, most of them African American, were gunned down in a supermarket.</p> <p>The horror of two large-scale gun tragedies collided just a few months before the 10th anniversary of the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. That assault in December 2012 took the lives of 20 six- and seven-year-olds as well as six school employees.</p> <p>Sandy Hook Promise, the advocacy group to end gun violence that was set up by families of the school victims, said on Tuesday that they were "devastated about reports that multiple people are dead, including children [in Texas]. Our hearts are with the families and community as this tragic story unfolds."</p>

Chris Murphy, the Democratic US senator from Connecticut who took his seat in Congress a month after the Sandy Hook shooting, expressed on Twitter the visceral emotions rippling through the country as news spread of the disaster. “Oh my god. I’m shaking. I’m just shaking all over. With fear. With anger. With resolve,” he wrote.

In a searing speech from the floor of the Senate just hours after the Texas shooting happened, Murphy vented 10 years of pent-up outrage at the lack of action on the part of his congressional colleagues despite the litany of violent gun deaths. “What are we doing?” he asked.

Days after Buffalo, the country faces yet another Sandy Hook, he said, and turned the spotlight directly on his peers in the US senate, whom he accused of inaction in the face of the carnage. “There are more mass shootings than days in the year. Our kids are living in fear. This happens nowhere else but here in the United States of America and it is a choice, it is our choice to let it continue.”

A similar sense of frustration and outrage was conveyed on CNN by Charles Ramsey, former police commissioner in Philadelphia. “This is something we should not even be talking about, this is absolutely crazy,” he said.

“And what is crazy about it is that nothing will be done about it. When is this going to end? At some point in time we all have to say that’s enough. It’s enough and it all has to end. We have to save our kids, because this is what’s happening every single day in our cities.”

The demands for action were echoed at the highest levels when Joe Biden, who ordered the White House flag to be flown at half mast, addressed the nation in a somber speech after returning from a five-day trip to Asia that was bookended by tragedy.

“I had hoped when I became president I would not have to do this, again. Another massacre,” he began, before taking a harsh tone in calling for “common sense” gun legislation.

“When in God’s name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?” he said. “Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen?”

“It is time to turn this pain to the action,” he added.

Urgent calls to break the political impasse continued to pour in throughout the day.

In a series of tweets on Tuesday evening, former president Barack Obama said that “it’s long past time for action” on gun violence in the US. “We’re also angry for them. Nearly ten years after Sandy Hook– and ten days after Buffalo – our country is paralyzed, not by fear, but by a gun lobby and a political party that have shown no willingness to act in any way that might help prevent these tragedies,” he said.

First Lady Jill Biden, herself a teacher, tweeted, “Lord, enough. Little children and their teacher. Stunned. Angry. Heartbroken.”

Former congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona, who was a victim of a mass shooting in 2011, said she is “horrificed” at inaction surrounding gun violence in the US.

“How many more children will be killed by guns? How many young lives cut short, families shattered, communities traumatized because our leaders refuse to act on gun violence?” Giffords said. “Gun violence is a uniquely American problem – and it is now the leading cause of death for American children.

Shannon Watts, a gun control advocate with Everytown for Gun Safety, said caustically that Donald Trump will be addressing a conference held by National Rifle Association (NRA) in Houston, Texas, on Friday.

	<p>The event will be strictly gun-controlled in ways the NRA and Trump routinely oppose for any other setting. “Guns won’t be allowed in spaces where Donald Trump and NRA executives are speaking,” Watts said, “because someone might try to kill them.”</p> <p>Former congresswoman Debbie Mucarsel-Powell of Florida said the shooting shows how little has changed since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school attack in her home state in 2018.</p> <p>“Our elected leaders have been more interested in listening to the gun lobby than protecting our children – and until that changes, we will continue to see devastating incident after devastating incident.”</p> <p>Authorities are still working to identify the many young victims. Hal Harrell, the superintendent of the Uvalde consolidated independent school district, said that Robb elementary school called for support as the school and community grieved.</p> <p>“My heart is broken today,” Harrell said. “We’re a small community and we’re going to need your prayers to get through this.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Senator’s desperate plea for gun action
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/literally-on-my-hands-and-knees-senator-chris-murphys-desperate-plea-for-gun-action
GIST	<p>An impassioned speech by the congressman who formerly represented the town of Sandy Hook has gone viral in the wake of a mass shooting at a Texas elementary school that killed at least 18 children.</p> <p>Chris Murphy, a Democrat who came to Congress representing the district that included the Connecticut town and is now a Senator, begged his colleagues to finally pass legislation that addresses the nation’s continuing gun violence crisis.</p> <p>“What are we doing here?” Senator Murphy asked, tears brimming in his eyes, moments after learning that 19 students had been massacred.</p> <p>‘This happens nowhere else but here in the United States of America,’ Senator Chris Murphy said. “This isn’t inevitable. These kids weren’t unlucky. This only happens in this country and nowhere else,” he continued. “It is a choice. It is our choice to let it continue.”</p> <p>Speaking to reporters afterward, Murphy did not mince words about the anticipated Republican reaction to the shooting – that the United States needs to do more to address mental illness and that guns are not inherently the problem.</p> <p>“Spare me the bullshit about mental illness,” Murphy said. “We don’t have any more mental illness than any other country in the world. You cannot explain this through a prism of mental illness because we’re not an outlier on mental illness ... We’re an outlier when it comes to access to firearms and the ability of criminals and very sick people to get their arms on firearms. That’s what makes America different.”</p> <p>In his emotive speech on the Senate floor, the senator then clasped his hands together and pleaded with Republicans to help Democrats pass meaningful gun reform legislation.</p> <p>“I am here on this floor to beg, to literally get down on my hands and knees to beg my colleagues: find a path forward here,” he said.</p> <p>Few senators understand the horror mass shootings inflict on a community quite like Murphy, who spent the hours after the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school consoling families who had lost children and loved ones.</p>

He spoke about the lasting trauma inflicted on students, schools and communities. Since that massacre 10 years ago when 20 children and six adults were killed, Murphy has made it his mission to enact gun control reform only to be disappointed again and again as the bills fail to overcome the Senate filibuster.

Murphy asked Republicans: “Why do you go through all the hassle of getting this job, or putting yourself in a position of authority if your answer is that, as this slaughter increases, as our kids run for their lives, we do nothing.”

He asked again: “What are we doing?”

“Sandy Hook will never ever be the same. This community in Texas will never ever be the same. Why? Why are we here if not to try to make sure that fewer schools and fewer community go through what Sandy Hook has gone through, what Uvalde is going through.”

The tragedy in Texas appeared to be similar to the 2012 mass shooting in Connecticut, where 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot his way into the locked building and then killed 20 first graders and six educators with an AR-15-type rifle.

Murphy expressed hope that compromise on gun control measures is possible and urged fellow lawmakers to take a stand. Democrats lack a large enough majority in the Senate to pass gun control reforms without Republican support.

“I understand my Republican colleagues will not agree to everything that I may support, but there is a common denominator that we can find,” he said, acknowledging the problem of gun violence cannot be solved overnight.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Uyghurs detained: Xinjiang police files leak
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/thousands-of-detained-uyghurs-pictured-in-leaked-xinjiang-police-files
GIST	<p>A new trove of hacked Chinese police photographs and documents shedding light on the human toll of Beijing’s treatment of its Uyghur minority in Xinjiang has been published as the UN high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, visits cities in the region.</p> <p>The data trove – referred to as the Xinjiang police files and published by a consortium of media including the BBC – dates back to 2018 and was passed on by hackers to Dr Adrian Zenz, a US-based scholar and activist, who shared it with international media earlier this year. It includes thousands of photographs of detained people and details a shoot-to-kill policy for people who try to escape.</p> <p>The ruling Communist party is accused of detaining more than 1 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the far-western region as part of a years-long crackdown the US and politicians in other western countries have labelled a “genocide”. In addition to mass detentions, researchers and campaigners accuse Chinese authorities of waging a campaign of forced labour, coerced sterilisation and the destruction of Uyghur cultural heritage in Xinjiang.</p> <p>Chinese officials and diplomats call such allegations “lies of the century” and insist that Beijing’s policy in Xinjiang is concerned with counter-terrorism, de-radicalisation and vocational training.</p> <p>In a separate academic paper published on Tuesday, Zenz wrote that the newly leaked files explained how political paranoia that promoted exaggerated threat perceptions had led to the pre-emptive internment of large numbers of ordinary citizens. He was targeted by Chinese sanctions last year.</p> <p>In October, the Associated Press reported that Chinese authorities had scaled back many of the most controversial methods adopted in Xinjiang. “The panic that gripped the region a few years ago has subsided considerably, and a sense of normality is creeping back in,” its report said.</p>

On Tuesday China's ambassador to the UK, Zheng Zeguang, [tweeted](#): "Such a shame for BBC to carry the fabricated story about so-called 'detention camps'. Pathetic for the media, in cahoots with the notorious rumour monger, to once again spread disinformation about Xinjiang."

Tuesday's publication of the mass data leak coincided with Bachelet's controversial trip to Xinjiang. The former Chilean president told a group of China-based diplomats on Monday that her trip was aimed at promoting, protecting and respecting human rights, according to Bloomberg News, citing sources who attended the invitation-only online meeting. She did not say it was an "investigation".

Bachelet is the first top UN human rights diplomat to visit China since 2005, and critics of the Beijing government have expressed fears that the authorities would organise what they called a "Potemkin-style tour" for her.

The US and the UK have both expressed scepticism over what could be realistically achieved on Bachelet's trip. The British ambassador to China, Caroline Wilson, tweeted on Monday that she had "stressed the importance of unfettered access to Xinjiang and private conversations with its people," in her call with the UN rights chief.

The UK foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said on Tuesday that the leaked files contained "shocking details of China's human rights violations" against the Uyghur Muslim population.

"We reiterate our longstanding expectation that China grants the UN high commissioner for human rights full and unfettered access to the region so that she can conduct a thorough assessment of the facts on the ground, and we are following her visit this week closely," Truss said in a statement. "If such access is not forthcoming, the visit will only serve to highlight China's attempts to hide the truth of its actions in Xinjiang."

German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, who held an online meeting on Tuesday with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, called for a transparent investigation after "shocking reports and new evidence of very serious human rights violations in Xinjiang".

"Human rights are a fundamental part of the international order and Germany is committed to protecting them worldwide," Baerbock said. "I think it's important that these accusations, which have been known for a long time, are addressed by the Chinese side, and I made that very, very clear in this morning's discussion."

Germany's economy minister Robert Habeck called the latest reports of internment, mistreatment and forced labor of Uyghurs "particularly shocking". Habeck said Germany for years had shied away from looking too closely at the problematic human rights record of its close trading partner, but that the country's new center-left government was taking a different approach.

Germany would scrutinize environmental, social and human rights aspects when considering German companies' requests for loan guarantees for their investments in China, he said. "We will also examine very closely Chinese firms' takeover bids in Germany," he added, saying one recent offer was prohibited while another was withdrawn by the company after questions were raised.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, echoed the concerns. She tweeted: "Horried by the Xinjiang Police Files, which spotlight China's mass incarceration of Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities." Thomas-Greenfield also said that Bachelet and her office "must take a hard look at these faces and press Chinese officials for full, unfettered access and answers."

Bachelet is expected to visit the Xinjiang cities of Ürümqi and Kashgar on Tuesday and Wednesday as part of a six-day tour. The Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, meanwhile told Bachelet on Monday that he hoped her trip would "clarify misinformation" on China's human rights record.

HEADLINE	05/25 Day 91 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-91-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia's military campaign in Ukraine has entered its most active phase, according to Ukraine's defence ministry spokesperson, Oleksandr Motuzyanyk. Battles being fought in eastern Ukraine could determine the country's fate, he added. "The situation on the (eastern) front is extremely difficult because the fate of this country is perhaps being decided (there) right now."• Russian forces have taken control of three Donetsk region towns including Svitlodarsk, according to the regional governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko. Earlier today, it was reported that Russian forces had entered Svitlodarsk and hung up a Russian flag over the city administration building.• The governor of Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region said the situation there "is only getting worse" as Russian troops advance. "The situation is very difficult and unfortunately it is only getting worse. It is getting worse with every day and even with every hour," said governor Sergiy Gaidai. "They are simply eliminating Severodonetsk from the earth."• The bodies of more than 200 people have been discovered in the rubble of a high-rise apartment building in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, according to a Ukrainian official. Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to Mariupol's mayor Vadym Boychenko, said workers found the bodies while digging through a basement underneath the collapsed building.• Ukrainian soldiers captured by Russian forces after the three-month siege of the Azovstal steel plant are being held in "satisfactory" conditions, according to the unit commander's wife, amid uncertainty over the fate of the prisoners. At least 1,000 Ukrainian fighters, including members of the Azov battalion, were transferred to Russian-held territory last week after the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol was taken by Russian forces.• Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said the Russian offensive in the Donbas is "the largest one on European soil since WWII". He urged allies to "speed up deliveries of weapons and ammunition". The UK's Ministry of Defence said Russia has increased the intensity of its operations in the Donbas as it seeks to encircle Severodonetsk, Lyschansk, and Rubizhne in order to place the whole of Luhansk oblast under Russian occupation.• Ukraine is gathering the bodies of dead Russian soldiers found in formerly occupied towns in the hope of exchanging them for prisoners of war or for Ukrainian bodies. In Kharkiv, 60 bodies were retrieved and stacked in a refrigerated rail carriage, Reuters reports.• Ukrainian prosecutors have launched a war crimes investigation in Kharkiv's Gorky Park which was hit by about 50 shells in three months of war. "Hitting civilian targets, civilian infrastructure, trying to kill civilians and destroy cultural heritage, are considered war crimes. An error can happen once or twice, but there are 56 hits recorded. It's not an accident. They were targeting the park," Ukrainian prosecutor Roman Petrenko said.• A new survey has found that 82% of Ukrainians believe that their country should not sign away any of its territories as part of a peace deal with Russia under any circumstances. Researchers at the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found that only 10% of respondents found it acceptable for Ukraine to concede territory to achieve peace.• Turkish officials will meet with Swedish and Finnish delegations in Ankara on Wednesday to discuss the Nato bids by the two Nordic countries. Finland's foreign minister, Pekka Haavisto, said his country and Sweden would send delegations to the Turkish capital to try to resolve its opposition to their applications for membership in the military alliance. Turkey's foreign ministry confirmed the meeting.• A Russian court has rejected an appeal from opposition leader Alexei Navalny against a nine-year prison sentence he is serving for large-scale fraud and contempt of court, charges which he denies. Navalny lambasted President Vladimir Putin during court hearing, casting him as a madman who had started a "stupid war" in Ukraine based on lies.• Russia's foreign ministry has announced a ban on 154 members of the British parliament's House of Lords on entering the country, in a tit-for-tat move for sanctions against Russian officials over Ukraine. It accused them of having "used their authority to whip up anti-Russian hysteria in the UK" and "pandered to the Russophobic political course of the British Conservative government".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens to be the “beginning of the third world war” that could spell the end of civilisation, the veteran philanthropist and former financier George Soros has warned from the World Economic Forum in Davos. Soros added that autocratic regimes were in the ascendant and the global economy was heading for a depression.
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HEADLINE	05/25 High-profile Russian defectors
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/im-never-going-back-the-high-profile-russian-defectors-rejecting-war
GIST	<p>Igor Volobuyev spent two decades working in the heart of the Russian business establishment, first for Gazprom and then for its affiliate Gazprombank, where until February this year he was vice-president.</p> <p>Then Vladimir Putin launched his war on Ukraine in late February, and Volobuyev decided he could no longer stand living in Russia. He packed a small rucksack of possessions and a stack of cash, and flew out of the country on 2 March, pretending he was going on holiday.</p> <p>A few days later, he crossed from Poland into Ukraine, where he spent his childhood years. Now, he spends his days trying to convince officials to provide him with Ukrainian documents and allow him to sign up for military service.</p> <p>“I want to go to the place where I can defend my homeland with a weapon, I’m trying every day,” he said, in an interview in the suburbs of the capital, Kyiv. “I am never going back to Russia.”</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of Russians are believed to have fled the country since Putin launched the war, and many intellectuals, journalists and activists have voiced their opposition to the conflict. However, among the political and business elites, defections have been extremely rare. Despite reports of widespread dismay over the invasion of Ukraine, only a tiny handful of people have spoken publicly to condemn the war.</p> <p>On Monday, Boris Bondarev, a career diplomat posted to the Russian mission to the UN in Geneva, became the highest-level Russian diplomat to denounce the war. When he resigned, Bondarev published a scathing letter in which he wrote that he was “ashamed” of his country and called the invasion a “disaster”.</p> <p>Bondarev said he made his mind up to resign on the day Russia launched its invasion, but it took months to gather the resolve to go public.</p> <p>Like many fellow diplomats, Bondarev had remained in his post over the past decade, despite Russia’s growing isolation due to a series of crises, including its annexation of Crimea and the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in 2014.</p> <p>“You understand that it is wrong,” he said in a telephone interview. “That it’s not good. But it doesn’t really touch you, your life. These bad things they happen somewhere far away. It’s not right but that’s how most people think.”</p> <p>“But now this is totally different: Russia attacked another country. This is Ukraine who we always considered to be our brothers and attacked them in the most brutal manner. Bombing cities. Claiming them to be Nazis and denazified. It’s something ridiculous. It’s something unimaginable.”</p> <p>Bondarev said he believed many of his fellow diplomats were also opposed to the war, but he never discussed it with them. “It isn’t something you really talked about with other people, it isn’t something you can speak about openly these days,” Bondarev said. “Everyone is silent.”</p> <p>Volobuyev said that after 2014, he had started to speak openly about his concerns over Russian politics in the workplace, and while many people were scared of getting involved in a discussion, he felt that most people he knew agreed at least partially.</p>

“In Gazprom there were a few passionate Putinists, but the majority of people understood exactly what kind of country they lived in. A lot of people in Russia are just scared,” he said.

“You have this internal censorship, that it’s dangerous to say certain things, and you live with this permanently. Ukrainians look at this and they don’t understand it because they are a free people,” he said.

Volobuyev grew up in the Ukrainian city of Okhtyrka , and left for Moscow in 1989, when he was 18. After spending some time in journalism, he joined Gazprom, where he worked for 15 years before moving to become one of Gazprombank’s vice-presidents in 2015.

As he tells it, he was originally a supporter of Putin, and voted for him in 2012, but his “eyes were opened” by the Maidan revolution in 2014 and subsequent Russia-backed war in Donbas. He wanted to return to Ukraine then, but said he could not, for family reasons, about which he declined to elaborate.

“It was a choice between my homeland and my family, and at that time I chose my family. On 24 February this year, I understood I could not put it off any longer,” he said.

Volobuyev was a mid-ranking cog in the Gazprom machine; among the higher business echelons few people have dared to break ranks.

Oleg Tinkov, a self-made billionaire who set up one of Russia’s leading banks, has so far been the most outspoken public opponent of the war among the business elite. In one of a series of critical Instagram posts, Tinkov wrote: “I don’t see ANY beneficiary of this crazy war! Innocent people and soldiers are dying.”

After his statements, Tinkov said he was forced to sell his assets at a knockdown price to an oligarch loyal to the Kremlin. In an interview with the Russian journalist Yury Dud, he said he was sure that the entire business elite backed his statements but were too scared to say the same publicly.

“I have spoken to 12 of the top 20 on the Forbes list personally, and they all support me, there is a full consensus,” he said.

He said half of those he had spoken to justified their silence by claiming to fear for their tens of thousands of employees, who could be affected if they fell out of favour with the Kremlin.

“The other half say, ‘We’ll make a statement and then lose our business, like you, and then what, what have you achieved?’”

Putin has referred to those who oppose Moscow’s actions as “scum and traitors”, whom the Russian people will “spit out like a fly”. In the current climate it is clear that public opposition to the war makes it dangerous to return to Russia.

Bondarev said he was worried about the response to his statement and said he would “welcome” an offer of asylum in the west. Tinkov has said he has hired bodyguards.

As a Russian citizen of Ukrainian origin, Volobuyev’s position is a little different. His arrival in Ukraine has given him a feeling that he has finally returned home, he said. But he accepts that he has a lot of work to do to persuade Ukrainians of his sincerity.

“All these years, I said I was Ukrainian but I continued to live and work there. I understand that I have to repent, and to prove for many years that I should be allowed to live here and that I can be trusted,” he said.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Airports crowded now? Summer worse
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/why-airport-crowding-is-so-bad/

THE APPETITE TO travel again after more than two years of [lockdowns and mask mandate debates](#) has yielded one completely predictable result: Many airports and airlines are unprepared for a massive surge in traffic, and things [might get much worse this summer](#).

Spring Break 2022 was an opportunity to see whether air travel could scale up to meet one of its biggest demands since the Covid crisis began. It was a test the industry [largely failed](#), with challenges [exacerbated by bad weather and thousands of canceled flights](#). Stories of flyers [abandoning their rental cars](#) to catch flights amid endless lines and pilots crashing out (so to speak) and [sleeping in airports](#) are becoming all too common.

Even with a higher-than-inflation [hike in flight prices](#) caused by fuel-cost increases and other factors, airports are [expected to be packed this summer](#), at least if there's no major Covid variant wreaking havoc on travel plans. What can you do to avoid the chaos, or at least understand the factors at play? We spoke to some air-travel experts about the situation and their tips for navigating it.

What's Causing These Snarls at US Airports?

A lot of factors behind airport delays tie back to Covid-19: Demand is up as travel restrictions have been lifted and some coronavirus numbers have dipped. High gasoline prices are also [putting the kibosh on long road trips for some](#). And more people are [getting stuck at airports](#) due to canceled or delayed flights caused by technical issues (such as [Southwest's early April system outage](#)) or low staffing.

[Daniel Findley](#), associate director at the [Institute for Transportation Research and Education](#) in North Carolina, says staffing cutbacks through the industry have created a lean system that leaves little margin for error, [especially when weather comes into play](#).

"You see it on the pilot side, for instance, and on flight crews, air traffic control, and on the supply chain and material side. When one thing breaks, you know, is there another pilot and flight crew that can come in when some critical engine part needs to be replaced?" Findley says, "What's the cascading effect when in the morning the flight crew isn't in the place it needs to be and there's no backup crew? Now you've missed a whole day of flights and those connections."

The Great Resignation and other factors could also contribute to canceled flights, delays at security lines, and staffing issues, Findley says. "There are other things, specifically, like pilot retirements, but it's mostly related to Covid and the general labor market."

Findley says one other major shift that could stretch into summer is that lingering Covid fears, overseas travel restrictions related to Covid, and high flight prices are making more Americans forego international travel and stay in the US, contributing to domestic airport crowding.

"Whether they're going to regional beaches or national parks, that has affected our domestic market, maybe in ways we weren't expecting," he says.

How Long Will This Last?

Staffing cuts at airlines and airports, and among government security agents for air travel, [have been unprecedented](#), largely [due to the steep drop in demand for flights](#) in 2020 and 2021 as Americans stayed home. There's no telling how long it will take to staff back up, says [William Rankin](#), a professor of airport management at the Florida Institute of Technology. The closest we've seen to this situation was after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

"When 9/11 occurred, of course we shut down the entire system for several days. Overall, it was three to four weeks (of disruption), but then the time to gear back up was probably six to nine months before we were at full capacity, staff-wise," Rankin says. He says he "couldn't even begin to speculate" how long that might take post-Covid.

On top of all the other reasons for cancellations and long lines, some airports are also dealing with multi-year [construction projects](#) that may have flyers scrambling to find parking or rerouted gate departures.

Those kinds of projects can take multiple years; some airports will have trouble handling large crowds well into next year, especially if staffing woes continue.

What Can Be Done?

Airport construction projects, security logjams, and stories about holiday airport meltdowns may have an amplifying effect on delays. Spooked passengers who fear long lines and missed flights may get to the airport hours before they need to, causing more unexpected crowding.

“That sometimes clogs up screening checkpoints, affecting the capacity to handle that throughput,” Rankin says. One solution to that, which was used after 9/11 in Fort Lauderdale, was to restrict checkpoints to within two hours of a flight. If things get particularly crowded and difficult to handle this summer, Rankin said, that may be one tactic airports can use to control the flow of travelers.

For passengers, the best solution may just be to have backup options and stay well-informed. Rankin suggests using airline and airport apps that provide real-time scheduling information and alerts on delays, rather than waiting on text messages or calling in for updates. “It’s up to the passenger to monitor their flight situation,” Rankin says.

Findley says one way you can tell the air-travel industry is gearing up for a marathon of crowded airports is by the beefed-up amenities. “You see airports with really nice restaurants, comfortable places to relax, places to charge your phone. They’re recognizing that people are spending more time in airports, and they’re trying to make that experience as comfortable as possible ... Airlines, airports, and concessionaires ultimately need to work together to provide an optimal customer experience.”

Findley says he usually books earlier flights with longer layovers to account for potential delays or cancellations that could affect his route. “I’d rather have a four-hour layover and have some wiggle room than a two-hour layover and miss my flight,” he says.

Other ways to counter bad airport news: If you live within driving distance of multiple airports, use that to your advantage if you have to rebook travel or get routed elsewhere. Some airlines have even incorporated ground travel into their own plans. In Philadelphia, American Airlines is [now incorporating buses on some routes](#) to nearby airports.

Above all, Findley urges, travelers should remember what a miracle air travel is and should refrain from taking frustration out on airport, security, or airline personnel.

“It’s highly unlikely you’re talking to the person who created any of the problems. They don’t want this either; they don’t want people to have a bad experience,” he says. “Keep in mind that we have a very lean system at the moment, and there’s only so much that people can do.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Despite Covid, summer routines, travel
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Pandemic-weary-Americans-plan-for-summer-despite-17195756.php
GIST	<p>HONOLULU (AP) — A high school prom in Hawaii where masked dancers weren't allowed to touch. A return to virtual city council meetings in one Colorado town after the mayor and others tested positive following an in-person session. A reinstated mask mandate at skilled nursing facilities in Los Angeles County after 22 new outbreaks in a single week.</p> <p>A COVID-19 surge is underway that is starting to cause disruptions as the school year wraps up and Americans prepare for summer vacations. Many people, though, have returned to their pre-pandemic routines and plans, which often involve travel.</p> <p>Case counts are as high as they’ve been since mid-February and those figures are likely a major undercount because of unreported positive home test results and asymptomatic infections. Earlier this month, an influential modeling group at the University of Washington in Seattle estimated that only 13% of cases were being reported to U.S. health authorities.</p>

Hospitalizations are also up and more than one-third of the U.S. population lives in areas that are considered at high risk by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Northeast has been hit the hardest.

Yet vaccinations have stagnated and elected officials nationwide seem loath to impose new restrictions on a public that's ready to move on even as the U.S. death toll surpassed 1 million people less than 2 1/2 years into the outbreak.

"People probably are underestimating the prevalence of COVID," said Crystal Watson, public health lead in the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security's Coronavirus Resource Center. "I think there's a lot more virus out there than we recognize, and so people are much, much more likely than they anticipate to be exposed and infected."

A major metric for the pandemic — the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. — skyrocketed over the last two weeks, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. The figure was about 76,000 on May 9 and jumped to nearly 109,000 on Monday. That was the highest it had been since mid-February, when the omicron-fueled surge was winding down.

Deaths are still on the decline and hospital intensive care units aren't swamped like they were at other times during the pandemic, likely because vaccinations and immunity from people who have already had the disease are keeping many cases less severe.

"The nature of the disease has changed. Two years ago I was seeing a steady flow of bad pneumonia cases. Now we are in a situation where people should be able to avoid that outcome by taking advantage of vaccines, pre-exposure prophylaxis (for high risk), and early anti-viral therapy," Dr. Jonathan Dworkin, a clinical infectious diseases physician in Hawaii, said by email.

In Hawaii, which once had one of the nation's lowest rates of infection, hospitalization and death, new cases are surging among the state's 1.4 million residents. The University of Hawaii will again require masks indoors across its 10-campus system beginning Wednesday.

With cases climbing for eight straight weeks, Hawaii has the second highest infection rate of any state, trailing only Rhode Island. But because positive home test results aren't counted in official data, Hawaii's health department estimates that the case count is actually five or six times higher.

Despite its surge, visitors have been flocking to Hawaii's beaches, especially in recent months.

Yaling Fisher, owner of Hawaii Aloha Travel, said bookings to the islands haven't slowed during the surge. On the contrary, they've increased.

"Even now we are still busy," she said. "We don't see any cancellations."

Samantha Hanberg, who was in Hawaii this week with her newlywed husband, said the couple left their masks at home in California when they left for vacation. She said she contracted COVID-19 early in the pandemic and subsequently got fully vaccinated, so she too feels safe.

"Nobody wants to get sick, but it's definitely not at the forefront of my thought process anymore," she said, snacking on shave ice on Waikiki Beach. "I'm to the point now where I just I want to go back to living and enjoying life, and not being so worried."

Officials initially shut down Hawaii's tourism industry by requiring all incoming passengers to quarantine. They shifted to a testing requirement and then a vaccination exemption before dropping all restrictions in March.

	<p>Hawaii was the last state in the nation to drop its mask mandate, though it remains the only state to require all public school students to wear masks while indoors — a rule that will remain in effect throughout the summer and possibly into the next school year.</p> <p>Nearly two years after California Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed the nation's first statewide stay-home order, the state formally shifted to an “endemic” approach in February. Like Hawaii and many other states, its weekly infection rate has risen dramatically of late.</p> <p>The new surge led the school districts in Pacific Grove and Berkeley to reinstate their indoor mask mandates, while an outbreak at a Northern California long-term healthcare facility had sickened 26 residents and 10 staff members by Monday.</p> <p>Some Northeastern school districts have also revived their mask mandates, including those in Philadelphia and Providence, Rhode Island.</p> <p>However New York, which was once the U.S. epicenter of the pandemic, doesn’t seem likely to follow suit. The city is dealing with another surge in cases, but Mayor Eric Adams has all but ruled out bringing back a citywide mask mandate unless hospitals get inundated again.</p> <p>The city's school district jettisoned its practice of closing classrooms if multiple students test positive, merely recommends that masks be worn and even abandoned its requirement that students need to be vaccinated to attend prom.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 WA eyes Arizona mental health services
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/three-lessons-washington-can-learn-from-how-arizona-helps-people-in-mental-health-crisis/
GIST	<p>MARICOPA COUNTY, Ariz. — Arizona is renowned for its red, desert terrain, the striking beauty of the Grand Canyon and — perhaps less well known — one of the best mental health crisis response systems in the country.</p> <p>For more than 20 years, the state has been building an integrated crisis system that has shown success in keeping people with mental illnesses and substance use issues out of jails and hospital emergency departments, and getting them care. The system has been used as an example of best practices by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and other organizations like the Vera Institute for Justice. Now, Washington state leaders are looking to the state for inspiration as they rethink local mental health systems.</p> <p>This month, around four dozen Washingtonians involved in mental health care policy, including state lawmakers, county council members and state agency leaders, visited Maricopa County to learn about the system there.</p> <p>The visit came as Washington plans the rollout of the 988 crisis line set to go live this summer. State leaders are hoping to use the hotline’s launch as a catalyst to further stitch together pieces of Washington’s heavily siloed and underfunded mental health system. Here’s what they learned about Arizona’s approach, and what it could mean for our state.</p> <p>No wrong door</p> <p>The Arizona model starts with a simple but key philosophy: There’s no wrong door into the mental and behavioral health system. Whether a person has a mental illness, addiction problems, an intellectual or developmental disability, or all of the above, everyone gets access to services at the same place.</p> <p>In Washington, by contrast, patients have a hard time finding help between specialized facilities, the ER, jails and the community. People with criminal or complex backgrounds often get turned away from facilities or struggle to find an available bed, especially if their insurance doesn’t cover the services or</p>

they're uninsured. That means they often go without treatment and end up cycling through the system again.

Dr. Michael Riddle, a medical officer running the RI International Recovery Response Center in Peoria, Arizona, advocates for an integrated approach to behavioral health, thinking through what brought the person into crisis and what will help keep them from crisis again.

"It's really important to approach every soul that we touch as an investigation," Riddle said.

"We are detectives. We're not bouncers" who turn people away if they are too sick or violent, he added.

Arizona's integrated crisis system, which it has been building for decades, includes mobile crisis teams, a hotline and crisis centers where people can walk in or be dropped off by mobile crisis teams, law enforcement or others. Maricopa County itself has three crisis facilities, dispersed so they're about a 20-minute drive regardless of where you are.

At the centers, people can get crisis counseling or medication if needed. According to Mercy Care, the Medicaid-contracted provider in Central Arizona, law enforcement dropped off 28,000 people (some may be repeat drop-offs) at crisis centers in 2021; people are rarely turned away.

There's also no need for people to get medical clearance at a hospital first. Staff are trained to identify medical concerns and reroute people to the hospital if needed, but that occurs only in about 6% of cases. This means fewer people end up staying in hospital emergency rooms waiting for help, reducing the cost of care.

The Arizona system has prioritized making it easy for police to bring people to the crisis center for help: It usually takes less than 10 minutes to drop someone off, so officers can spend more time on other calls, and more importantly, people are kept from needlessly entering jail.

Staff will also connect guests (RI does not refer to them as patients) to housing services or addiction treatment if needed. But the responsibility is on staff to navigate the system for their guests, rather than placing that burden on families and individuals.

The Seattle area has limited crisis care facilities, such as a 46-bed facility run by DESC, and many people in mental health crises end up at local emergency rooms. The Arizona operator, RI, also runs a 16-bed facility in Fife.

Intertwining services

In 2020, the Crisis Response Network, which runs a regional hotline and crisis services in Northern and Central Arizona, received more than 258,000 calls. They also dispatched a mobile crisis team 19,440 times, and in a little under half of those instances, a person asked for transportation to a center.

Though Seattle and parts of Washington state also have crisis hotlines and mobile crisis teams, many times those systems are not connected. And when it comes to the few individuals who need further care, there are limited places for them to go.

The treatment center that Washington representatives toured in Arizona was split up into three sections: a crisis center, a short-term bed area and a respite center. The crisis center has 32 beds for people with a high and immediate need. People tend to stay there for 23 hours or less, and regardless of insurance, they get care.

Clinicians assess the client and if someone is an immediate threat to themselves or others, they can be safely restrained, though staff stress that is only used as a last resort. At this stage, people also get medication if necessary. If a clinician finds the person does not need this level of care or they stabilize, people can "step down" into the short-term bed area.

That area consists of 16 subacute beds where people typically spend two to four days. From there they can move into what's called a "living-room model" respite center. This is a completely voluntary space where people can stay for seven to 10 days.

Arizona experts say it's a more comforting and therapeutic space, compared to a sterile and loud ER, and it's certainly cheaper. It's also a shift away from a binary system that triages patients based on their acuity or severity of symptoms, meaning people don't have to wait until they're "sick enough" to seek care — and their treatment doesn't start in an emergency room.

The crisis system here is also partially staffed by peers who have firsthand experience with mental illness or substance use disorder — 60% of the staff at this center identify as such. Notably, the rate of people flipping from involuntary to voluntary care is also quite high at 70%. Washington, in comparison, does not make ready use of peers. During the last legislative session, a bill to expand the peer workforce was floated but ultimately didn't make it.

Another difference is that repeat admissions at the crisis center are seen as a success.

"That's not a failure. That's community service," said Jamie Sellar, chief strategy officer at RI International. "That's going to keep them out of a hospital for 11 days. It's going to keep them out of jail on misdemeanor charges."

Arizona also has another key difference that officials say helps streamline their ability to move people through care: Arizona's involuntary treatment law (the point at which someone's civil liberties are taken away due to a severe mental health crisis) states that staff cannot be held liable if, upon release, a patient causes harm to another person, as long as staff take "reasonable precautions" to prevent harm.

In Washington, however, the laws around liability are fuzzier. "Given the case law and the potential for large financial judgments, the culture in Washington state around behavioral health provider liability is quite cautious," the Washington State Hospital Association told The Seattle Times. This means, for example, staff here may be more likely to call in designated crisis responders who can involuntarily commit someone, rather than face potential litigation — contributing to bottlenecks in the system and frustrating patients and families.

Maximizing funding

To fund its system, Arizona uses what's called a braided funding model. Federal, state and county dollars are coupled with federal grants. That money is then disseminated to the regional behavioral health authority, which contracts with providers to deliver services to people. Arizona spends more per capita (\$216.87) and per client (\$9,210) than Washington, which spends \$128.46 per capita and \$5,938 per client, according to 2015 data analyzed by the American Addiction Centers — though advocates say spending the money on mental health care means much less needs to be spent at jails and hospitals.

Arizona also maximizes parity — the requirement that insurers pay for mental health care equally with physical health care — by billing commercial insurance for as many crisis services as possible.

In Washington's funding model, behavioral health facilities must individually charge Medicaid and commercial insurers, on top of securing additional money through grants, which makes long-term sustainability hard.

Much of Arizona's mental health system is a response to *Arnold v. Sarn*, a class-action lawsuit filed after the state was found to not be serving people with severe mental illness despite previously passing a law that said it would provide integrated treatment services. The case was finally settled in 2014, and now years of work have gone into reconfiguring the behavioral health and crisis system.

"I came to Arizona in 2004 to a crisis system that was existing but not working well," said Dr. Chris Carson, an emergency room psychiatrist now working at Connections Health Solutions, an organization providing crisis services in Phoenix and Tucson.

“We look back over our shoulder from 2022 — and that process is not complete by any shade of imagination — but we’ve made a great deal of progress across the board.”

Carson points out that though the state has worked to fine-tune the crisis model, it struggles with systemic challenges linked to mental health like homelessness and substance use. Like much of the U.S., Arizona also faces a staffing shortage with a workforce that is burned out and underpaid. The Phoenix metro region is also struggling with a growing housing crisis, as rents rise and push people out of housing. Still, Carson says, the model here should be refined and replicated everywhere.

Rep. Lauren Davis, who was on the Arizona trip along with Rep. Tina Orwall, Sen. Manka Dhingra, Metropolitan King County Councilmembers Girmay Zahilay and Sarah Perry, community advocates, and others from state agencies, has already committed to taking those lessons and applying them to a new crisis center in Lynnwood. Originally the project was going to build a new jail with more beds. Davis and other local leaders pushed to instead reduce the number of jail beds and dedicate at least 16 short-term crisis beds for people with mental health problems.

“[Arizona] gave us the playbook. Right? The playbook is those three things,” said Davis, referencing the crisis phone lines, mobile teams and crisis centers.

Davis said most of the work now is connecting the dots across those three systems, and increasing funding for behavioral health.

“We’ve actually made substantial investments in all three. Now we need to actually do it.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 King Co. approves appointment next sheriff
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/king-county-council-approves-patti-cole-tindall-as-permanent-sheriff/
GIST	<p>The Metropolitan King County Council on Tuesday unanimously approved Patti Cole-Tindall to be the county’s next sheriff.</p> <p>King County Executive Dow Constantine earlier this month chose Cole-Tindall, who has been serving as interim sheriff since Jan. 1, for the permanent position.</p> <p>Her appointment was the end result of a nationwide search that yielded 12 applicants and ultimately three finalists who went through a public interview process.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall has served in the sheriff’s department, most recently as second in command, for more than six years, but she drew praise as an unorthodox candidate who, in her interim role, has improved communication and raised morale in the department.</p> <p>When Constantine tabbed her as interim sheriff in November, she pledged not to seek the full-time job, saying it would be a distraction from the work she needed to do.</p> <p>But she says she changed her mind after receiving “many, many requests” from department employees who thought “the sheriff’s office was turning around to be an agency that they wanted to be part of.”</p> <p>Cole-Tindall, 57, is the first appointed sheriff in more than 25 years, after county voters, in 2020, chose to switch the position from elected to appointed. Her confirmation Tuesday was all but perfunctory, with little discussion among council members. Several had already voiced their endorsement after Constantine announced her as the choice.</p> <p>“She has built trust and rapport with the rank and file and also comes to this position with a very unique background,” Councilmember Jeanne Kohl-Welles said Tuesday.</p>

“We have a really unique set of skills and experiences in our new sheriff that are going to prove very important,” Council Chair Claudia Balducci said.

Cole-Tindall will be ceremonially sworn in June 17.

Cole-Tindall has a long career in public service, but most of it has been outside traditional law enforcement.

Cole-Tindall began her career in law enforcement in 1991 as a special agent with the Washington State Gambling Commission, a position for which she carried a gun and completed the state’s basic law enforcement academy. She moved to the state Employment Security Department, where she worked on investigations into fraud and theft of unemployment benefits.

She moved to King County government in 1998, working as an investigator in the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention. She was later an assistant director in the department’s Community Corrections Division.

Constantine tabbed her in 2010 as the county’s director of labor relations, responsible for representing the county in collective bargaining. She was interim director of the county’s Office of Law Enforcement Oversight in 2014.

Because so much time passed between her stints in law enforcement, nearly two decades, Cole-Tindall is no longer a certified law enforcement officer. She will have to enroll in and recomplete Washington’s 19-week basic law enforcement academy. She’ll have to start by January 2023 and has said she would appoint somebody to serve as acting sheriff while she’s in the academy.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Doctors in Africa see double standard
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/24/africa-europe-monkeypox-virus-outbreak/
GIST	<p>DAKAR, Senegal — In a part of Nigeria that has dealt with monkeypox outbreaks for years, one doctor saw the photos circulating in Western media this week and chuckled.</p> <p>“Those are the <i>very</i> severe cases,” said Oyewale Tomori, a virologist in the nation’s southwest. “Like, ‘Ahh! This is monkeypox!’ ”</p> <p>The virus — discovered five decades ago in the Democratic Republic of Congo — causes mild illness in most people, along with blisters that usually clear up in weeks, he said. It’s much less transmissible than the coronavirus and much less deadly than Ebola. There’s already an effective vaccine.</p> <p>What bothers infectious-disease experts across the continent is the double standard that has emerged since monkeypox grabbed the world’s attention: Few seemed to care, or even notice, until people in the West started getting sick.</p> <p>In the past two weeks, cases of the animal-borne virus typically found in West and Central Africa have popped up in the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel and a growing number of European countries. There have been at least 92 confirmed infections and no deaths. Belgium has imposed a 21-day quarantine. President Biden assured Americans that the United States has enough vaccine stocks to address the threat.</p> <p>Yet global alarm bells didn’t sound as several African nations battled outbreaks in recent months. The graphic images blazing across social media — some of the same ones used to illustrate monkeypox since the 1970s — rarely feature White patients.</p> <p>“These cases are recorded in Europe,” Tomori said. “Why are you using a picture of an African? Those are your pox.”</p>

The World Health Organization has not yet verified the origin of the outbreak, though one WHO adviser told the Associated Press that the cases [could be linked](#) to raves in Spain and Belgium. Monkeypox usually spreads by close contact, including sexual activity.

Health officials suspect the virus has been traveling undetected in nonendemic nations for some time — potentially as far back as 2018. Early tests suggest cases stem from the West African strain, which the WHO said has a fatality rate of about 1 percent.

Before monkeypox struck the West this year, the WHO said Nigeria, Cameroon and the Central African Republic all recorded small case numbers. But contact tracing is limited, said Yap Boum, a Cameroonian epidemiologist. Infections tend to arise in remote, forested areas, where people encounter wildlife that carry monkeypox, such as primates and rodents.

“Maybe now that it’s happening over there, the problem will get more attention,” Boum said, “and we will gain access to more vaccines, more treatments — all the things we did not have the money for.”

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been battling the world’s largest outbreak by far: at least 1,238 cases and 57 deaths since January. The strain found there is also much more deadly, with a fatality rate as high as 10 percent. Many deaths are preventable, doctors said, but treatment can be hard to find in areas with underfunded hospitals.

“It can be devastating in the same way as covid-19,” said Health Minister Jean Jacques Mbungani. But the country’s monkeypox preparations lost steam during the pandemic. The nation needs more tests, more inoculations, more medical workers tracing cases and caring for the ill.

“The response is not effective,” Mbungani said, “and remains lethargic due to the scarcity of resources.”

The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control said Monday that the bulk of documented cases have been mild. Young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems face a heightened risk.

One of Nigeria’s top genomic sequencing experts, Christian Happi, is inviting his counterparts to come study how his country has managed monkeypox.

“It’s not that scary here,” he said. “People are used to it. Come learn from our public health authorities. Come see how we contain it.”

The global enthusiasm to combat the virus should have arrived sooner, he said. Maybe it could have been eradicated by now.

“Paying attention to disease wherever it happens benefits everyone,” he said. “As the pandemic has shown us, we are all in this together.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 WHO: mass immunization not urgent
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/24/monkeypox-vaccine-smallpox-cdc-who/
GIST	<p>The spread of the monkeypox virus has pushed the United States and European countries to evaluate their vaccine supplies and possible treatments, even as health officials said mass immunization was not needed now.</p> <p>Some health authorities have also urged careful assessment before expanding the use of smallpox vaccines to protect against monkeypox.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the U.S. stockpile includes over 100 million doses of an older generation of smallpox vaccine believed to be effective against monkeypox, and it is aiming to</p>

accelerate the supply of a newer vaccine that could help curb a potential outbreak. Its European counterpart recommended on Monday that countries update contact-tracing systems and “review the availability of smallpox vaccines, antivirals and personal protective equipment for health professionals.”

While studies suggest that smallpox vaccine — given to some military members and lab workers — is at least 85 percent effective against monkeypox, according to the CDC, the shot is linked to rare, serious side effects such as heart inflammation, the agency says. It recommends that people with weakened immune systems or certain skin conditions should not take it unless exposed.

Still, the CDC says that for most people, the risks from monkeypox are greater than from either vaccine.

The older smallpox vaccine “has some potential significant side effects with it, so a decision to use that widely would have to have some serious discussions behind it,” Jennifer McQuiston, a CDC deputy director, told reporters in a news conference Monday after President Biden said the country was exploring vaccine options.

Any vaccine distribution now would focus on people “that we know would benefit from it,” such as health-care workers or those who came in close contact with a confirmed case, she added. Many countries, including the United States, Britain, Canada and France, stopped routine smallpox vaccinations in the 1970s, as the disease was eliminated around the world.

German authorities have warned that Europe is facing its largest outbreak of the disease, characterized by a rash and lesions that are the most significant source of spread, such as through skin-to-skin contact. In the United States, a single case was confirmed as of Monday, in Massachusetts, with four potential cases under investigation. More than 100 cases have been confirmed in at least 13 other countries outside West and Central Africa, where the disease is endemic.

The U.S. stockpile has more than 1,000 doses of the newer vaccine, Jynneos, which is not widely available and was approved in 2019 for the prevention of smallpox and monkeypox, the CDC’s McQuiston said.

“We expect that level to ramp up very quickly in the coming weeks, as the company provides more doses to us,” McQuiston said. The company that developed Jynneos has said the U.S. government exercised its option for a \$119 million order that will allow for a freeze-dried version of the shot to be manufactured and invoiced in 2023 and 2024.

The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control said smallpox vaccine doses could be considered after exposure for close contacts who are at high risk, but it noted that more information is needed on their use for groups that face increased risk of severe disease.

The World Health Organization, which has a stockpile of smallpox vaccine previously estimated at 31 million doses, has noted that immunity will probably be limited to older people who were vaccinated before countries such as the United States stopped administering shots to the public.

As Britain records a rise in cases, it has offered a smallpox vaccine to some health workers. Meanwhile, Germany’s health minister said the country was evaluating vaccine options for those who may be at risk but noted that “vaccination of the general population is not being discussed.”

A senior WHO official echoed those comments on Monday. Richard Pebody, who leads the high-threat pathogen team in Europe, told Reuters the WHO believes the monkeypox outbreak does not require mass vaccination because hygiene and safe-sex measures, as well as contact tracing and isolation, can help to control it.

He said immediate vaccine supplies and antiviral treatments were limited but added that the virus does not spread easily. WHO epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove also described the outbreak on Monday as “a containable situation” and said stopping transmission was possible.

	The so-far unexplained monkeypox spread has raised some alarm as the world reels from the coronavirus pandemic, but health officials have stressed that this virus is neither new nor as easily transmissible. The latest spate of cases stands out in part because many have no travel links to countries where monkeypox is more regularly found, according to health officials.
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HEADLINE	05/24 Covid cases soar in South America
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/vaccines-bring-optimism-as-covid-cases-soar-in-south-america/
GIST	<p>BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — After a reprieve of months, confirmed cases of COVID-19 are surging in the southern tip of South America. But officials in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay hope high vaccination rates mean this latest wave will not be as deadly as previous ones.</p> <p>At the same time, there is concern that many people are not ready to once again take on the prevention measures that authorities say are needed to ensure cases remain manageable.</p> <p>Cases have been steadily increasing for weeks, largely fueled by the BA.2 version of the omicron variant. In Chile, the number of weekly confirmed cases more than doubled by late May when compared to the beginning of the month. In Argentina, cases rose 146 percent in the same period, while in Uruguay, the increase was almost 200 percent.</p> <p>Although the number of positive tests remain far lower than in previous waves, experts say the increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is a reminder that the pandemic is far from over.</p> <p>Argentina’s health minister, Carla Vizzotti, recently said that Argentina is “starting a fourth wave of COVID-19” while in Chile, Health Minister Begoña Yarza characterized the current moment as “an inflection point in the pandemic” and in Uruguay, President Luis Lacalle Pou, said he was “worried” and called on everyone to be “vigilant.”</p> <p>The countries are part of a regional trend as cases have been rising across the continent.</p> <p>“COVID is again on the rise in the Americas,” Carissa Etienne, the head of the Pan American Health Organization, said during an online news conference last week.</p> <p>For many residents in the region, the sharp increase has meant they suddenly have to think about the coronavirus again.</p> <p>“There were numerous cases in my family after my birthday last week,” Marina Barroso, 40, said outside a testing center in a Buenos Aires suburb. “The number of cases has really shot up.”</p> <p>The high increase in cases has yet to translate to significant numbers of hospitalizations and deaths. Officials are crediting high vaccination rates in the region as more than 80 percent of the population in the three countries have received at least two doses.</p> <p>“We are in a very different situation from the previous waves since so much of the population is immunized,” Claudia Salgueira, the president of the Argentine Society of Infectious Diseases (SADI), said.</p> <p>In Uruguay, the number of beds in intensive care units occupied by patients has doubled, from 1.5 percent in the beginning of the month to a little more than 3 percent by mid-May.</p> <p>“Sure, mathematically we doubled the cases but we’re still talking about small numbers,” said Julio Pontet, president of the Uruguayan Society of Intensive Care Medicine who heads the intensive care department at the Pasteur Hospital in Montevideo. “What is protecting us from the serious cases is our high level of vaccination.”</p>

In previous waves, there has been a lag between a rise in cases and hospitalizations “and it’s likely that the same thing will happen now,” said Felipe Elorrieta, a mathematical epidemiology researcher at the University of Santiago. “Still, the death toll will be lower now.”

Chile is at an advantage because it enjoys the highest level of vaccinations in the region and the highest rate of booster shots in the world with more than 80 percent of people having at least a third dose, he said.

Chile has been able to get such a large proportion of its population to receive booster shots by essentially making life very difficult for those who eschew the shots.

Starting in June, Chile will block the “mobility pass” of any adult who received the first booster more than six months ago and has not received a second booster shot. Without the pass, Chileans are not allowed to go to restaurants, bars nor attend large events.

In other countries in the region, some are warning the vaccination campaign is lacking because of how many people have yet to receive boosters.

“There is an enormous percentage of people who don’t have the adequate vaccination, four million people only have one dose, 10 million only have two and there’s a group that does not have any,” said Hugo Pizzi, an infectious disease specialist who is a professor in the medical school at Argentina’s Córdoba National University. “There’s an apathetic, defiant attitude among the population that is really maddening.”

Adriana Valladares, a 41-year-old retail worker in Buenos Aires, says the increase in cases is not going to change how she lives.

“I have three doses so I feel pretty protected,” she said. “I used to be really scared of this virus but now I know lots of people who caught it and they were fine.”

Some are finding that it is not as easy as it once was to get tested.

“There is a huge increase in cases but they aren’t testing anywhere,” José Sabarto said in Avellaneda, Buenos Aires province. Sabarto said his daughter was diagnosed with COVID and a family member wanted to get tested but was having a difficult time finding active testing centers.

It’s important for testing infrastructure to be “maintained and strengthened,” Etienne said.

“The truth is,” she added, “this virus is not going away anytime soon.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Ukraine lab in Russia conspiracy theory
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-news-russia-war-us-biological-weapons-lab-conspiracy-theory/
GIST	<p>Kyiv — From cholera to anthrax, Ukraine's Virology Reference Laboratory in Kyiv has housed some of the most infectious diseases known to humankind. Dr. Natalia Vidayko, the lab's chief researcher, led us through a maze of white walls and stainless steel equipment. Researchers in lab coats hovered over petri dishes, each containing genetic samples of diseases sent in for analysis.</p> <p>If you ask the Kremlin, the vials and Bunsen burners at the Ukrainian Health Ministry facility are all part of a sinister plot.</p> <p>On February 27, three days after President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine, Russian officials claimed one reason they did it was because the U.S. was "filling Ukraine with biolabs, which were — very possibly — used to study methods for destroying the Russian people at the genetic level."</p>

Despite a complete absence of evidence, the [claim went viral](#) on social media, eventually making its way onto Fox News, where host Tucker Carlson demanded answers. "What exactly were they doing in these secret Ukrainian biolabs?" he asked.

Which is what brought us to the laboratory in Kyiv. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has [called it a "biological war lab."](#)

But when we arrived at the entrance, the only security in sight was a geriatric German Shepherd named Rambo, who graced us with a lugubrious walk outside of his doghouse, and then walked back in.

We were told we were the first journalists allowed inside since Russia's invasion. But the facility is routinely inspected by international agencies including the World Health Organization.

Dr. Vidayko showed us state-of-the-art equipment for containing dangerous pathogens — not to make weapons, she told us, "but to test for diseases in patients."

But that all changed when Russian forces invaded Ukraine on February 24, she said, when the shelling began.

"They bombed a building right nearby," the scientist told CBS News.

From that day, the Ukrainian government ordered the lab, and others, to destroy all particularly dangerous strains, she said.

"Because it was a very high biological risk," she said, noting that if the building was attacked, dangerous pathogens could have been released into the environment.

She walked me over to the machine that technicians used to kill the diseases, known as an autoclave. "They're completely destroyed," she repeated.

But the viral conspiracy theory didn't die with them.

"This crazy fake," she lamented to CBS News. "There's no evidence, just blah blah blah."

Nevertheless, a poll found that 26% of Americans believed Russia's baseless claim, and that includes some members of congress, like Republican representative Marjorie Taylor Green, who [introduced a bill](#) in March to ban U.S. funding of "bioweapons" in Ukraine.

Dr. Vidayko said she worried that, because so many people have bought the Kremlin's line, she and her colleagues could become targets.

The Pentagon has warned that Russia could use her laboratory and others like it in a so-called "false flag" attack, in which Russian forces stage their own biological strike to blame it on Ukraine.

"When we first heard these lies about bioweapons, we thought it was funny," Vidayko said. "But we're not laughing anymore."

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HEADLINE	05/24 Surfside bldg. collapse settlement tops \$1B
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/total-surfside-building-collapse-settlement-now-tops-billion/story?id=84943103
GIST	The proposed settlement reached nearly a year after the catastrophic Surfside building collapse along the South Florida coast now exceeds the billion-dollar mark, attorneys said Tuesday.

During a court hearing in Miami Tuesday morning, attorney Harley Tropin announced the settlement reached for families who lost loved ones in the Champlain Towers South collapse has reached \$1,004,600,000, up from the \$997 million figure announced earlier this month.

Tropin said that some additional lawsuits connected to the collapse have been mediated through the main settlement, resulting in additional payouts.

"I'd like to see this transaction closed as soon as possible," Judge Michael Hanzman, who is overseeing the cases, said during the hearing. "There are a lot of people in the community who have suffered economic anguish over this."

Hanzman told attorneys that he would like to schedule the final hearing to have the settlement presented and approved by June 23 -- one day prior to the anniversary of the collapse that killed 98 people.

Hearings for families requesting claims are scheduled to begin on Aug. 1.

The judge said that payout sums will differ from family to family.

"I'm going to hear every family's presentation who wants to be heard," Hanzman said. "The hearings will go as long as reasonably necessary."

Also during Tuesday's hearing, Hanzman said that \$96 million would go to compensate the Champlain Towers' individual condominium owners for the loss of property -- a \$13 million increase over the tentative \$83 million that had been tentatively announced in March.

The sum is still less than the \$105 million allocation that had been sought on behalf of those unit owners.

The additional \$13 million will likely come from the \$120 million expected to be paid by the company bidding to buy and redevelop the beachfront site of the collapse, as well as property insurance.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Russian forces pummel Ukraine's east
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/europe/russia-ukraine-donbas.html
GIST	<p>SIEVIERODONETSK, Ukraine — A woman climbed down from the ambulance, wailing, her hands covered in blood. Police medics drew her inside their first aid post, as she appealed for help for her husband, who lay in the ambulance.</p> <p>“Please, God, let him live,” the woman, Olha, said. “You cannot imagine what a person he is. He is a golden person.”</p> <p>But the stretcher bearers were already standing down. Olha’s husband, Serhii, died at midday Tuesday, another victim of the relentless barrage of artillery and gunfire that Russian forces have rained down on this frontline town for three months.</p> <p>Sievierodonetsk, a mining and industrial town, lies at the heart of eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region, which puts it squarely in Moscow’s cross hairs. Rebuffed in the capital, Kyiv, Russian forces have turned the full force of their efforts to the east, with the goal of seizing a large chunk of territory next to the Russian border, though it has come at some cost for them.</p> <p>Sievierodonetsk is strategically critical for the Ukrainians, too, and they have spent weeks fiercely defending it. Earlier this month, Russian forces sustained heavy losses as they tried to cross the Seversky Donets River nearby and solidify their position.</p> <p>In Sievierodonetsk, that has meant months of trauma as Moscow tries to encircle the town and lay siege to it. Russian forces are now in place on three sides.</p>

Travel to Sievierodonetsk is perilous. To get here on Tuesday, a reporting team from The New York Times drove with a police escort through small villages and fields to avoid shell fire from Russian positions, and then sped across a single lane bridge that is the only route remaining into the town.

Debris from the Russian bombardment lay on almost every street.

The fins of rockets stuck out of craters in the asphalt. A broken electricity pylon and cables were draped across the street. And burned-out cars, shredded by shrapnel and sometimes overturned, lay abandoned wherever a blast had thrown them. A truck hung precariously off the side of a bridge.

For the police officers of Sievierodonetsk, it was just another day.

Officers have kept up a police presence in the town, as well as in the neighboring city of Lysychansk, running in supplies for the remaining townspeople, picking up the dead and wounded, and evacuating people away from the front line.

“A lot of them were nobodies, but when the war started they became heroes,” the police chief of the Luhansk region, Oleh Hryhorov, said of his officers. “A lot of them have stayed because they really understand this as their duty.”

Though much of the region that Chief Hryhorov is responsible for has been seized by Russian forces, he has managed to maintain a headquarters in Sievierodonetsk, and commands a force made up mainly of natives of the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk that Russia claims as its own. Many of them lost their homes eight years ago in the war in eastern Ukraine, and now have lost everything a second time, he said.

As the Ukrainian military fights to defend the town, battling with artillery and tanks to fend off Russian advances, the police force has tried to tend to the needs of the civilian population. Inside a warehouse, workers drew up lists of those who needed aid and those who were seeking evacuation. A line of blankets on wooden pallets served as a first aid post. In the yard, people filled buckets from a water tanker.

All the while, the Russians have increased their bombardment in the past few days, and a new assault seems imminent, the police chief said.

Now, even civilians who had opted to stay in their homes, rejecting earlier offers of evacuation, are asking for help getting out, Chief Hryhorov said. The police are bringing out 30 or 40 people a day.

The danger is also rising for his officers, who number more than 100 in the two settlements. On Tuesday, he held a meeting with his staff to strategize about what to do in the event of encirclement by the Russians.

For now, they will stay put, he said, since there is no one else to provide for the people.

Out of a prewar population of 100,000, thousands of people still remain, many living in basements and communal bomb shelters, others remaining at home in apartments or small wooden cottages amid gardens and tree-lined streets. Some are pensioners. Some lack the means — or the inclination — to escape. Still others sympathize with the Russian government.

Many appeared simply overwhelmed by events.

As a team of officers unloaded supplies of food for families in apartment blocks in the old part of the town, two women approached the police commander. They wanted to be evacuated, but they cared for their mothers, both of whom were bedridden from strokes.

“I am without money, without pennies,” said Viktoriya, 49, starting to weep. “I have no relatives and nowhere to go.”

Viktoriya had been in touch with an American aid group that had offered to help when the town still had telephone and internet connections, but, she said, they never came. Her mother, Valentina, is 87 and cannot walk, she said.

As she spoke, sniper fire whistled close overhead. The police commander ducked and swung around to look for the impact. But the two women seemed oblivious to the gunshot, as well as to the explosions sounding nearby.

The second woman, Lyudmila, 52, said she lived in an apartment on the fourth floor and did not dare go down to the basement when there was bombardment because she could not bear to leave her mother upstairs alone.

“I have to feed her by hand,” she said. “We sit and feel fear and don’t know what to do.”

The apartment block had already been hit once by a shell, and one apartment was partly burned.

“We will not promise, but we will try,” the police chief said, responding to the women’s evacuation request.

Police teams have been gathering those who want to leave in small groups and ferrying them to an assembly point, where they are then taken out in an armored bus.

The operation is full of pitfalls and uncertainties, not least the onset of new shelling, which stalls any movement. But as the teams gathered at police headquarters in Lysychansk to plan the next evacuation, they said the latest delay was caused by a group of evacuees themselves who were demanding extra assurances.

Other officers were tending to those for whom help was too late.

Three police officers, braving shell fire, set off to collect and bury the dead in Lysychansk. They drove a white van to a home where a 65-year-old woman, whom neighbors called Grandma Masha, lay in the yard on her back, her arms splayed out under a blanket. Her dog growled and barked from his kennel as the officers placed her in a body bag and carried her out on a stretcher.

Grandma Masha was a diabetic and the war made it difficult to get her medicine, said her neighbor, Lena, 39. Her son had left with his family, and was not able to get back when she fell ill, Lena said. Like most people interviewed for this article, she preferred to give only her first name, for reasons of security.

“I did not want this to happen at all,” she declared. “It’s a completely stupid war — but no one asked for my opinion.”

The police officers collected another body, of a 60-year-old man called Sasha who had lived in a small wooden house with an overgrown garden near a military base.

“There was shell fire, and then he died,” said his neighbor and friend, Mikhail, 51, exasperated. “He said he was feeling ill, but where were we to take him in an emergency?”

Sievierodonetsk has a hospital. But the sole doctor there is caring for 30 patients, and it has been heavily shelled and is virtually inaccessible, people in the town said.

The police officers drove on to the cemetery on the edge of town and backed their van up to a line of narrow trenches dug by a backhoe. They heaved the bags out of the van and swung them unceremoniously into the trench where 10 or so body bags already lay.

	<p>They have buried 150 civilians in three months, said the officer in charge, who gave only his first name, Daniel, 26. Only a few relatives were around to arrange proper burials, with the rest going into the communal graves.</p> <p>“It is very scary that you get used to it,” Chief Hryhorov said.</p> <p>His way of dealing with the war is to concentrate on one task at a time, he said.</p> <p>“And tomorrow will be another day and there will be some new tasks,” he said. “Probably, each of us should do what we must, and the result will be some common victory.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Stricter law requiring French in Quebec
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/canada/quebec-language-bill-96.html
GIST	<p>OTTAWA — Quebec’s legislature on Tuesday passed a law to reinforce the primacy of the French language, limiting access to public services in English and enhancing government powers to enforce compliance, despite objections from some of the province’s English speakers, Indigenous people and members of other linguistic minorities.</p> <p>The provincial government says the law is needed to preserve the status of Quebec as the largest French-speaking enclave in the Americas, while critics call it an attempt to create a monoculture within a proudly multicultural country. The national government says that about 85 percent of Quebec’s more than 8 million people speak French as their primary language.</p> <p>Expanding on existing language law, the legislation provides that immigrants to Canada who settle in Quebec will not be able to deal with the government in English or other languages more than six months after their arrival.</p> <p>Most small and medium-size businesses will require government certification that they operate in French, as larger companies have for years. And the new law will raise the bar that a company must meet to justify requiring that new workers speak or read languages other than French.</p> <p>Government language inspectors will have expanded powers to raid offices and search private computers and smartphones while investigating compliance with the law.</p> <p>Enrollment at English-language junior colleges will be capped, while new French language course requirements will be introduced at those schools. At those colleges, students whose primary language is not English will also have to pass a French proficiency test to graduate.</p> <p>While English speakers will still have the right to court hearings in their language, the new law changes how bilingual judges will be appointed, leading to concerns that they will dwindle in number over time.</p> <p>There are also concerns, strongly rejected by the provincial government, that the law will limit the ability of doctors and other medical professionals to speak with some patients in any language other than French.</p> <p>“This law is the most important reform for the status of the French language since the adoption of Bill 101 in 1977,” the law establishing French as the province’s official language, François Legault, the premier of Quebec, said in a statement posted on Facebook. “It is my responsibility as premier of the only government in North America representing a Francophone majority to ensure that French remains our only official language, our common language.”</p> <p>To defend the law against potential legal challenges, Quebec’s government invoked a clause in Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms that exempts the legislation from compliance with Canada’s Constitution.</p> <p>In recent weeks thousands of Quebecers from the province’s English-speaking, immigrant and Indigenous communities have protested the law.</p>

Shortly before the province's National Assembly in Quebec City passed the bill, Julius Grey, a prominent human rights lawyer in the province, called it "the most gratuitous use of power I've ever seen."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters in Vancouver, British Columbia, that the federal government will carefully review the law and its implementation but avoided questions about its involvement in any legal challenges.

"We continue to look very carefully at what the final form of this will take and we will base our decision on what we see as the need to keep minorities protected across the country," Mr. Trudeau said.

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HEADLINE	05/24 How safe is it to go back to the gym?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/well/move/covid-gym-air.html?
GIST	<p>Many gyms and health clubs seem to be filling up again with people eager to return to their old routines and communities or get in shape for summer, at the same time that new Omicron variants are pushing Covid infections up. So, how safe is it to go back to the gym?</p> <p>Put another way, how many microscopic aerosol particles are the other cyclists in your spin class breathing out into the room? How many is the runner on the nearby treadmill spewing forth? A small study about respiration and exercise published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences provides some rather startling answers.</p> <p>The study looked at the number of aerosol particles 16 people exhaled at rest and during workouts. These tiny bits of airborne matter — measuring barely a few hundred micrometers in diameter, or about the width of a strand of hair, and suspended in mist from our lungs — can transmit coronavirus if someone is infected, ferrying the virus lightly through the air from one pair of lungs to another.</p> <p>The study found that, at rest, the men and women breathed out about 500 particles per minute. But when they exercised, that total soared 132-fold, topping out above 76,000 particles per minute, on average, during the most strenuous exertion.</p> <p>These findings help explain why several notable Covid super-spreader events since 2020 have occurred at indoor gym classes. They also could renew some people's concerns about indoor gym programs as Covid-19 cases increase again in much of the nation and raise questions about how to best reduce risks of exposure when we work out.</p> <p>In general, packing hard-breathing bodies into enclosed spaces is a bad way to avoid transmission of Covid-19 or other respiratory diseases. In 2020, 54 South Koreans developed Covid after Zumba classes with infected instructors and then passed it to family members and acquaintances. Later that year, all 10 members of a spin class in Hawaii taught by an infected instructor tested positive afterward, as did another 11 who came into close contact with one of the class members, a personal trainer and kickboxing instructor.</p> <p>Scientists investigating these and similar outbreaks speculated that inadequate ventilation and high respiration rates among the exercisers contributed to the wildfire-like spread of Covid at the affected gyms. But the scientists could only guess about the extent to which exercise had increased the levels of aerosol particles in the gym areas. Accurately measuring the rise in floating particles during exercise is difficult.</p> <p>So, for the new study, a group of exercise scientists and fluid dynamics researchers in Germany devised a novel way to measure aerosol emission, using a single stationary bicycle and rider inside an airtight tent. The cyclists wore silicone masks that captured their exhaled breaths, sending the air through tubes to a machine that counted each particle as it passed.</p>

The researchers first measured people's particle production as they sat still and then as they rode at an increasingly punishing pace, until they were too exhausted to continue. Particles were counted constantly.

The scientists expected the exercisers' aerosol output to grow, as intensity ramped up. We all breathe deeper and faster as we work out harder. But the extent of the increase "surprised us," said Henning Wackerhage, a professor of exercise biology at the Technical University of Munich and a senior author of the new study.

The rise in aerosol emissions began moderately as riders warmed up and started pedaling harder. But as they reached a threshold at which their exercise became noticeably more strenuous — about when a jog becomes a run or a spin class switches into intervals — the rise in emissions became exponential. The riders started huffing out about 10 times as much air per minute as at rest, while the numbers of particles per minute soared more than 100 fold as riders approached exhaustion (with considerable variation from person to person).

In a room filled with spin-bike riders, treadmill runners or boot campers, "the aerosol particle concentration would increase a lot," said Benedikt Mutsch, a graduate student at the Institute for Fluid Mechanics and Aerodynamics at the University of the German Armed Forces in Munich and study co-author. The more particles, the more possibility of Covid-19 infection, if any exercisers are infected.

"The study provides mechanistic data to back up the assumption that exercising indoors is a higher-risk activity when it comes to transmission of Covid-19" than taking your exercise outside, said Linsey Marr, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech and expert on airborne transmission of viruses.

But these risks can be mitigated. "Good ventilation and air exchange are a great way to reduce transmission risk," said Chris Cappa, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of California, Davis, and expert in airflow dynamics.

"Open windows, especially with fans, can often be as effective as active ventilation systems," he said. If windows at your gym are closed, ask the manager to fling them wide and crank up the fans. If the weather is stifling and air conditioning necessary, make sure your gym's units draw air from outside, so fresh supplies replace the air filled with aerosol emissions from you and your classmates.

You might also suggest the gym install in-room air filters in each workout area, Dr. Cappa said. "These can be really effective in reducing transmission risk by removing the virus from the air." They can be [purchased commercially](#) or even [made at home](#), he said.

Also, stay well away from other exercisers. "Social distancing of six feet or more is always important," Mr. Mutsch said. But it may not be enough during strenuous, indoor exercise classes. The new study did not track where cyclists' aerosol particles flowed, but it is likely they stream well beyond six feet, he said. So, keep at least eight to 10 feet apart during strenuous workouts, which requires large rooms and small classes.

The classes themselves should likewise be well spaced. "If there are back-to-back exercise classes, some of the air from that first class will carry over to the second," Dr. Cappa said. Be sure there are breaks of at least 15 and preferably 30 minutes between sessions, to allow the air to clear.

Mask up, as well. "Respiratory face masks reduce aerosol emissions," Dr. Wackerhage said.

If you find a tight N95 mask uncomfortable during intense exercise, "I'd suggest wearing a good surgical mask," Dr. Cappa said, which may feel slightly less constricting and steamy.

Finally, check the incidence of Covid-19 in your area. “The higher the local case rates,” Dr. Cappa said, “the more likely it is that an infectious person might be in the class with you.” If rates are rising, perhaps cycle — or jog or walk or stroll — outside until cases decline.

But keep moving. This study “is more incentive to ensure great ventilation and no crowding in gyms,” Dr. Marr said. But it is not a reason to skip workouts. “There are so many benefits to exercise,” she said, “that I’ll keep doing it in my well-ventilated, uncrowded gym.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 CDC study examines problem of long Covid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/health/long-covid-infections.html
GIST	<p>One in five adult Covid survivors under the age of 65 in the United States has experienced at least one health condition that could be considered long Covid, according to a large new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Among patients 65 and older, the number is even higher: one in four.</p> <p>In an indication of how seriously the federal health agency views the problem of long Covid, the authors of the study — members of the C.D.C.’s Covid-19 Emergency Response Team — recommended “routine assessment for post-Covid conditions among persons who survive Covid-19.”</p> <p>Long Covid is the term used to describe an array of symptoms that can last for months or longer after the initial coronavirus infection. The researchers identified post-Covid health problems in many different organ systems, including the heart, lungs and kidneys. Other issues involved blood circulation, the musculoskeletal system and the endocrine system; gastrointestinal conditions, neurological problems and psychiatric symptoms were also identified in the study.</p> <p>In both age groups, Covid patients had twice the risk of uninfected people of developing respiratory symptoms and lung problems, including pulmonary embolism, the study found. Post-Covid patients aged 65 and older were at greater risk than the younger group of developing kidney failure, neurological conditions and most mental health conditions.</p> <p>“It is sobering to see the results of this study again confirming the breadth of organ dysfunction and the scale of the problem,” said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development at the V.A. St. Louis Health Care System and a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University in St. Louis, who was not involved in the research.</p> <p>The study evaluated electronic medical records for nearly two million people — comparing those who had been infected with the coronavirus with those who were not. The most common post-Covid conditions, regardless of age, were respiratory problems and musculoskeletal pain.</p> <p>The risk of post-Covid patients aged 65 and older developing the 26 health conditions the study evaluated was between 20 percent and 120 percent greater than people who didn’t get Covid. Those aged 18 to 64 had a 10 percent to 110 percent greater risk than uninfected people of developing 22 of the health conditions. But in that age group, Covid survivors were no more likely than uninfected people to develop most mental health conditions, substance use disorders or strokes and similar cerebrovascular conditions.</p> <p>Dr. Al-Aly said the study results “can potentially translate into millions of people with new diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, neurologic problems. These are lifelong conditions — certainly manageable, but not curable conditions.”</p> <p>The study analyzed records of 353,164 people who were diagnosed with Covid-19 in the first 18 months of the pandemic, beginning in March 2020. It compared them with the records of 1.64 million people who had a medical visit in the same month in which the Covid patients were diagnosed but did not become infected with the coronavirus during the study period, which ended on Oct. 31, 2021.</p>

People in both groups who had a history of one of the 26 health conditions in the previous year were excluded from the study — an attempt by the researchers to consider medical issues that patients developed only after they had Covid.

The study, which involved patients seen at health facilities that use a record system managed by Cerner Corp., a large medical data company, said the Covid patients included people admitted to hospitals, seen in emergency departments or diagnosed in an outpatient setting. The researchers did not indicate how many patients were in each group, one of several limitations of the study's findings.

Between 30 days and 365 days after their coronavirus diagnosis, 38 percent of the patients experienced one or more new health problems, compared to 16 percent of the non-Covid patients, the study said. The younger age group, 18-to-64, was somewhat less likely to have those problems — 35 percent developed long Covid issues, compared with 15 percent of uninfected people. In the 65-and-older group, 45 percent had new health conditions, compared with 19 percent of uninfected people.

Based on those percentages, the study authors calculated that nearly 21 percent of the younger group and nearly 27 percent of the older group developed health problems that could be attributed to long Covid.

The study did not look at the vaccination status of the patients and did not report characteristics like race, ethnicity, sex or geographic location. It also did not identify which coronavirus variants were linked to each case.

The C.D.C. authors concluded that post-Covid conditions might “affect a patient’s ability to contribute to the work force and might have economic consequences for survivors and their dependents.” They added that “care requirements might place a strain on health services” in “communities that experience heavy Covid-19 case surges.”

Dr. Al-Aly said he agreed that people who had Covid should be medically evaluated for potential new health problems.

“Now that we are in possession of knowledge that Covid-19 can lead to serious long-term consequences,” he added, “we need to develop additional tools to reduce the risk of long Covid.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Ukraine: Russians murdered mayor, family
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/europe/russia-ukraine-mayor-killed.html
GIST	<p>Eight Russian soldiers and mercenaries were charged on Tuesday with the murder of the mayor of a small Kyiv suburb and her family, Ukraine’s prosecutor general said.</p> <p>The mayor, Olha Sukhenko, was found in a shallow grave in her village, Motyzhyn, about 30 miles west of Kyiv, on April 2, after Russians withdrew from their positions around the capital. Her husband and son were buried with her.</p> <p>The prosecutor general, Irina Venediktova, said five of the accused men were soldiers in the Russian Army and three were part of the private military group Wagner, which is run by a businessman close to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. The soldiers included two lieutenants and three sergeants from one unit, the 37th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade.</p> <p>“They kidnapped Olga Sukhenko, her husband and son from the home of the village of Motizhyn,” Ms. Venediktova wrote on Facebook, publishing the names and photographs of all eight men.</p> <p>She said that, in March, the men detained Ms. Sukhenko and her family members and took them to a house they were using as a base. There, she said, the Russian fighters “tortured them, trying to beat out information” about the Ukrainian Army and defense forces. The prosecutor said the Russians killed Ms. Sukhenko’s son in front of her.</p>

“They first shot her son in the leg and then killed him with a shot in the head,” she wrote. “The whole family died from multiple gunshot wounds.”

She said the group of accused soldiers and mercenaries also terrorized other civilians, torturing and killing them, as well as pillaging and destroying their homes.

Ms. Venediktova asked that anyone with relevant information about the soldiers and mercenaries share it with the website the prosecution has established to collect testimony about war crimes.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Commission: new names for 9 Army bases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/politics/army-bases-confederate-names.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A Black sergeant who battled German soldiers during World War I. The Army’s first Hispanic four-star general. A woman who served as an Army surgeon during the Civil War.</p> <p>A commission established by Congress last year has suggested new names for nine Army bases that honor Confederate officers, as the American military continues an examination of its history with race that was intensified in the summer of 2020, after the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.</p> <p>The commission’s recommendations, if approved by Congress and Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, would see Fort Bragg — named after Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg — renamed Fort Liberty, the only one of the bases that would be renamed for an abstract idea and not a person.</p> <p>In the past, Army bases were largely named for white male soldiers. But the commission’s recommendations cover a multicolored swath of Americans, including women and minorities — two long-ignored populations that have served in or supported the army since its inception.</p> <p>Under the panel’s recommendations, Fort Lee in Virginia, named after Robert E. Lee, would be renamed Fort Gregg-Adams, after retired Lt. Gen. Arthur Gregg, a logistics officer who rose to become one of the highest ranking African Americans in the Army, and Lt. Col. Charity Adams Earley, the highest-ranking African American woman serving in the Army during World War II; she deployed to Birmingham, England, in 1945 and commanded a battalion responsible for delivering mail to American soldiers.</p> <p>The Army has long come under fire for honoring treasonous Confederate generals who fought to secede from the United States and who led the rebellion during the Civil War, which killed more American troops than any other military conflict. That criticism became particularly sharp after Mr. Floyd’s death, as President Donald J. Trump threatened to wield the military against protesters who said they were pushing for change.</p> <p>Mr. Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 to send active-duty troops into the cities to take on looters and rioters, but ran into heated and eventually public resistance from the defense secretary at the time, Mark T. Esper, and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.</p> <p>Mr. Esper and General Milley sought to convey an understanding of the public anger at the time, which had also manifested itself among those in uniform. They also sought to address a gap in the military between its mostly white officer corps and its diverse enlisted ranks, where 43 percent are people of color.</p> <p>Mr. Trump vehemently opposed the idea of stripping Confederate names from Army bases. “My Administration will not even consider the renaming of these Magnificent and Fabled Military Installations,” he said on Twitter at the time. “Our history as the Greatest Nation in the World will not be tampered with. Respect our Military!”</p> <p>The Naming Commission, as it is officially known, also reviewed Fort Belvoir, in Virginia, which was originally named after Army Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys in 1917, but then renamed in 1935 after</p>

the Colonial-era plantation that once stood on its grounds. The panel decided that renaming Belvoir did not meet its mandate but recommended that the Pentagon conduct its own review.

“This was an exhaustive process that entailed hundreds of hours of research, community engagement and internal deliberations,” said retired Navy Adm. Michelle Howard, the chairwoman of the commission.

“This recommendation list includes American heroes whose stories deserve to be told and remembered; people who fought and sacrificed greatly on behalf of our nation.”

Under the commission’s recommendations, Fort Gordon, in Georgia, would become Fort Eisenhower, after Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was a five-star general in the Army before becoming president. Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia would become Fort Walker, named after Dr. Mary Walker, an Army surgeon and noted abolitionist during the Civil War.

Fort Hood, in Texas, would become Fort Cavazos, after Gen. Richard Cavazos, who received a Silver Star for valor during the Korean War and who became the first Hispanic Army general, a four-star officer. Fort Pickett in Virginia would become Fort Barfoot, after Col. Van T. Barfoot, who received the Medal of Honor for his role in intense fighting against German soldiers near Carano, Italy, during World War II. He later gained attention for successfully fighting his homeowners association in order to keep an American flag flying in his front yard.

Fort Polk, in Louisiana, would become Fort Johnson, after William Henry Johnson, an African American Army sergeant who became one of the first Americans to be awarded the Croix de Guerre Avec Palme, France’s award for the highest valor, for bravery during a battle against German soldiers during World War I.

Fort Rucker, in Alabama, would become Fort Novosel, after Michael Novosel, who gave up the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve and became a chief warrant officer in the Army, which deployed him to Vietnam. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery while conducting a medical evacuation under fire during the Vietnam War.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Stocks fall; head again into bear market
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/business/stock-market-today.html
GIST	<p>Global stocks fell on Tuesday, giving back some of Monday’s gains and returning to the downward drift in recent weeks, as investors weighed mixed economic reports and company earnings.</p> <p>Monday’s rally had been the strongest start to a week since January, Jim Reid of Deutsche Bank noted, “so much so that there’s hope that the successive weekly losing S&P streak of seven might be ended.” But then, “just when you thought it was safe to emerge from behind the sofa,” he wrote, stocks were set to fall.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The S&P 500 fell 0.8 percent, bringing its drop from its Jan. 3 high to 17.8 percent. The Nasdaq composite, which is heavily weighted toward tech stocks that have led the monthslong slide in stock prices, fell 2.3 percent.• The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, a key benchmark for borrowing costs, fell 10 basis points, or about 0.1 percentage points, to about 2.76 percent, as demand rose for safer assets. (Yields, or the return on bonds, fall when prices for bonds rise.)• Snap, the maker of the messaging app Snapchat, said on Monday that it would miss its quarterly goals for sales and profit, citing inflation, interest rates, supply chain shortages and more. Snap’s shares were down 43 percent on Tuesday, with other tech platforms that rely on advertising, like Alphabet and Meta, also taking hits.• Abercrombie & Fitch fell 28.6 percent after the apparel company reported a loss of \$14.8 million in the three months ending in April amid higher costs for transportation and products. The company also slashed its sales forecast for the year from its previous outlook. Other retailers fell on the news, with Urban Outfitters and American Eagle Outfitters down 7.9 percent and 6.3 percent.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The market and investors are having these kneejerk reactions because there’s so much uncertainty about what the future of growth looks like for the economy and for corporations,” said Lindsey Bell, the chief money and markets strategist at Ally Invest. “You got retailers pointing to inflation as the reason for their weaker earnings results, so there’s a question mark about the health of the consumer.” • The electronics retailer Best Buy reported results on Tuesday that beat analyst expectations, pushing its shares up 1.2 percent. Although the company’s sales fell in its most recent quarter, the scale of the decline signaled that shoppers may not be as unnerved by inflation as some had feared after downbeat earnings from Walmart and Target last week. • In Europe, the Stoxx 600 index fell 1.1 percent, after business surveys showed that large economies like France and Germany continue to expand, albeit at a slower pace than in recent months. In Japan, a similar survey showed deteriorating conditions for manufacturers, with a sharp increase in delivery times related to shortages and pandemic lockdowns in China. Japan’s Nikkei 225 index fell 0.9 percent, China’s CSI 300 dropped 2.3 percent and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng lost 1.8 percent.
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HEADLINE	05/24 NKorea launches 3 ballistic missiles
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/asia/north-korea-ballistic-missiles.html
GIST	<p>SEOUL — North Korea launched three ballistic missiles, including a possible intercontinental ballistic missile, toward the waters off its east coast on Wednesday, South Korea’s military said. The launches came just as President Biden wrapped up a trip to the region, where he vowed to strengthen deterrence against the North’s growing nuclear threat.</p> <p>It was North Korea’s 17th missile test this year. The missiles were launched from Sunan, near Pyongyang, the North’s capital, at 6 a.m., 6:37 and 6:42, the South Korean military said. American and South Korean officials have warned in recent weeks that the North was ready to conduct either a nuclear test or an intercontinental ballistic missile test.</p> <p>Shortly after the North’s tests, the South Korean and United States militaries each launched a land-to-land missile off the east coast of South Korea to demonstrate what Seoul called the allies’ “swift striking capability to deter further provocations from North Korea,” as well as the South Korean military’s “overwhelming” ability to launch “precision strikes at the origin of North Korean provocation.”</p> <p>Separately, 30 South Korean F-15K fighter jets performed an “elephant walk” on the tarmac, ready to take off with a full load of weapons.</p> <p>The first missile launched on Wednesday by North Korea appeared to have been an ICBM, South Korean defense officials said. But it flew only 224 miles, the officials said, indicating that North Korea did not want to launch the missile on a full ICBM trajectory over the Pacific while Mr. Biden was in the air, on his way back to Washington after a visit to Seoul and Tokyo.</p> <p>The second missile launch apparently failed because it “disintegrated” after reaching an altitude of 12 miles, the South Korean officials said. The third projectile was a short-range ballistic missile.</p> <p>The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launches did not pose an immediate threat to the United States or its allies, but highlighted the North Korean weapons program’s “destabilizing impact.” In South Korea called the tests “a grave threat” to peace and called for the stronger enforcement of sanctions, warning that the North’s weapons tests would only “deepen its isolation.”</p> <p>North Korea last conducted an ICBM test on March 24, breaking a self-imposed moratorium that had been in place since 2018.</p> <p>The missile launches on Wednesday were a strong signal that North Korea was embarking on a new cycle of tensions in the Korean Peninsula despite the country’s first reported outbreak of the coronavirus. It also</p>

constituted North Korea's first public reaction to Mr. Biden's trip to the region, where he met with the leaders of South Korea and Japan and vowed to step up measures, including joint military exercises, to help deter the growing nuclear and missile threat from the North.

In [a meeting](#) with President Yoon Suk-yeol of South Korea in Seoul last Saturday, Mr. Biden said that the United States would bolster the alliance and increase deterrence in the face of the North Korean threat. Mr. Biden and Mr. Yoon announced that they would explore ways to expand joint military exercises that had been canceled or scaled down under President Donald J. Trump.

While in South Korea, Mr. Biden voiced a deep skepticism about the chances of meeting North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, whom Mr. Trump met three times. Asked by reporters if he had a message for Mr. Kim, Mr. Biden said simply: "Hello. Period."

Mr. Yoon has been highly skeptical of North Korea, as well, saying that the efforts by his predecessor, Moon Jae-in, to engage with the North in dialogue and reconciliation have failed to roll back its nuclear weapons program.

When Mr. Yoon was [sworn into office](#) on May 10, he dangled "an audacious plan" to vastly improve the North's economy and its people's quality of life. But like his conservative predecessors, he attached an important caveat: Such economic largess would be possible only "if North Korea genuinely embarks on a process to complete denuclearization."

The missile tests on Wednesday indicated that North Korea was not interested in nuclear disarmament talks anytime soon. In [a speech](#) delivered during a nighttime military parade in April, North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, reiterated that his people should prepare for a standoff with the United States "for a long period of time." He also vowed to expand his arsenal of nuclear warheads, intercontinental ballistic missiles and other delivery vehicles "at the fastest possible speed."

Mr. Kim has also appeared to adopt a more aggressive nuclear doctrine in recent weeks.

In the same speech, he seemed to take a page from the playbook of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia when he warned that his nuclear arsenal was not just to deter foreign invasion, but also to be used "if any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state."

Last month, Mr. Kim's sister and spokeswoman, Kim Yo-jong, said North Korea could use nuclear weapons "at the outset of war." After [a short-range missile](#) test last month, Mr. Kim said he was improving the "efficiency" of battlefield or "tactical nukes."

North Korea declared [a halt](#) to all nuclear and ICBM tests to set the stage for the [first summit meeting](#) between Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump in 2018. But the efforts at diplomacy ended without an agreement on how to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program or when to lift sanctions.

Mr. Kim has since vowed to find a "new way" to deal with Washington and started testing a [variety of new missiles](#). Analysts viewed his moves as raising the stakes in his confrontation with Washington and its allies by rapidly amassing a fleet of nuclear-tipped missiles and altering his country's nuclear doctrine.

The new cycle of tensions highlights an uncomfortable truth both for Mr. Yoon and the Biden administration: Despite decades of negotiations and sanctions, North Korea's nuclear capabilities have only become stronger and more dangerous.

"North Korea continues to improve, expand and diversify its conventional and nuclear missile capabilities, posing an increasing risk to the U.S. homeland and U.S. forces, allies, and partners in the region," John Plumb, the U.S. assistant secretary of defense for space policy, [told](#) the Senate Armed Services Committee this month. "Most of North Korea's ballistic missiles have an assessed capability to carry nuclear payloads."

HEADLINE	05/24 US speeds up reshaping Taiwan defense
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/politics/china-taiwan-military.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has accelerated its efforts to reshape Taiwan’s defense systems as it projects a more robust American military presence in the region to try to deter a potential attack by the Chinese military, current and former U.S. officials say.</p> <p>Russia’s war in Ukraine has made American and Taiwanese officials acutely aware that an autocrat can order an invasion of a neighboring territory at any moment. But it has also shown how a small military can hold out against a seemingly powerful foe.</p> <p>U.S. officials are taking lessons learned from arming Ukraine to work with Taiwan in molding a stronger force that could repel a seaborne invasion by China, which has one of the world’s largest militaries.</p> <p>The aim is to turn Taiwan into what some officials call a “porcupine”— a territory bristling with armaments and other forms of U.S.-led support that appears too painful to attack.</p> <p>Taiwan has long had missiles that can hit China. But the American-made weapons that it has recently bought — mobile rocket platforms, F-16 fighter jets and anti-ship projectiles — are better suited for repelling an invading force.</p> <p>Some military analysts say Taiwan might buy sea mines and armed drones later. And as it has in Ukraine, the U.S. government could also supply intelligence to enhance the lethality of the weapons, even if it refrains from sending troops.</p> <p>American officials have been quietly pressing their Taiwanese counterparts to buy weapons suitable for asymmetric warfare, a conflict in which a smaller military uses mobile systems to conduct lethal strikes on a much bigger force, U.S. and Taiwanese officials say.</p> <p>Washington increasingly uses the presence of its military and those of allies as deterrence. The Pentagon has begun divulging more details about the sailings of American warships through the Taiwan Strait — 30 since the start of 2020. And U.S. officials praise partner nations like Australia, Britain, Canada and France when their warships transit through the strait.</p> <p>In ramping up its posture and language, the United States is trying to walk a fine line between deterrence and provocation. The actions risk pushing President Xi Jinping of China to order an attack on Taiwan, some analysts say.</p> <p>A Chinese offensive against Taiwan could take many forms, such as a full-scale sea and air assault on the main island with missile barrages, an invasion of small islands closest to China’s southeast coast, a naval blockade or a cyberattack.</p> <p>“Are we clear about what deters China and what provokes China?” said Bonnie S. Glaser, director of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. “The answer to that is ‘no,’ and that’s dangerous territory.”</p> <p>“We need to think long and hard on how to strengthen deterrence,” she said.</p> <p>U.S. officials often discuss potential deterrent actions that end up being dropped because they are deemed too provocative. In the Trump administration, National Security Council officials discussed putting U.S. troops in Taiwan, one former official said. White House and Pentagon officials also proposed sending a high-level U.S. military delegation to Taiwan, but that idea was killed after senior officials at the State Department objected, another former official said.</p> <p>President Biden’s strong language during a visit to Tokyo this week tiptoed up to provocation, Ms. Glaser and other analysts in Washington said.</p>

The president asserted on Monday that the United States [had a “commitment”](#) to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan — the [third time](#) he has made such remarks during his presidency. And he explicitly said he would take measures that go beyond what the United States has done in Ukraine. While Beijing could see the words as belligerent, they are consistent with the new emphasis in Washington on forceful deterrence.

On Tuesday, Mr. Biden said in Tokyo that the decades-old policy of “strategic ambiguity” — leaving open whether the U.S. military would fight for Taiwan — still stands. “The policy has not changed at all,” he said.

Harry B. Harris Jr., a former U.S. ambassador to South Korea and a retired admiral who led the U.S. Pacific Command, said the United States now needed to adopt “strategic clarity” rather than “strategic ambiguity” to serve as a deterrent. China, he said, “isn’t holding back its preparations for whatever it decides it wants to do simply because we’re ambiguous about our position.”

The United States has been urging allies to speak up on Taiwan in an effort to show Beijing that Washington can rally other nations against China if it attacks the self-governing democratic island. On Monday, [Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan](#) said at a news conference with Mr. Biden that the two leaders had affirmed “the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait.”

In the three months of war in Ukraine, Washington has held together a coalition of European and Asian partners to impose sanctions against Russia. U.S. officials say they hope the measures send a message to China and other nations about the costs of carrying out the type of invasion overseen by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. U.S. officials are already discussing to what extent they could replicate the economic penalties and the military aid deployed in defense of Ukraine in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.

“I want P.L.A. officers to wake up each day and believe they cannot isolate Taiwan in a conflict and must instead face the decision of initiating a costly, wider conflict where their objectives are beyond their reach,” said Eric Sayers, a former senior adviser to the U.S. Pacific Command who is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, referring to China’s military, the People’s Liberation Army, by its initials.

U.S. intelligence analysts have been studying the evolving relationship between China and Russia and the lessons Beijing might be drawing from Ukraine.

Chinese leaders face a complicated calculus in weighing whether their military can seize Taiwan without incurring an overwhelming cost.

A [Pentagon report](#) released last year said China’s military modernization effort continued to widen the capability gap between the country’s forces and those of Taiwan. But the Chinese military has not fought a war since 1979, when it [attacked Vietnam](#) in an offensive that ended in a strategic loss for China.

To take Taiwan, the Chinese Navy would need to cross more than 100 miles of water and make an amphibious assault, an operation that is much more complex than anything Mr. Putin has tried in Ukraine. And in any case, perceived capabilities on paper might not translate to performance in the field.

“As we have learned in Ukraine, no one really knows how hard a military will fight until a war actually starts,” said James G. Stavridis, a retired four-star admiral and former dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. “China is probably not ready to take a risk of an invasion with current force levels and capabilities in terms of attacking Taiwan.”

American officials are not making that assumption. They have pressed Taiwan to buy weapons systems that they deem suitable for asymmetric warfare against China. The Biden administration recently told the Taiwanese Defense Ministry not to order MH-60R Seahawk helicopters made by Lockheed Martin, and it has also discouraged orders for more [M1A2 Abrams tanks](#).

Admiral Stavridis said the United States needed to get weapons into the hands of the Taiwanese quickly if an invasion looked imminent, with a focus on systems that would wear down Chinese offensive capabilities.

“That would include smart mines, anti-ship cruise missiles, cybersecurity capability and special forces who can neutralize Chinese advance teams, and air defense systems,” he said.

U.S. officials consider mobility to be critical and are encouraging Taiwan to buy mobile land-based Harpoon anti-ship missiles. Stinger anti-aircraft missiles could also be valuable for staving off the Chinese air force.

The pace of Taiwan’s weapons purchases has increased. Since 2010, the United States has announced more than \$23 billion in arms sales to Taiwan, according to the Pentagon report from last year. In 2020 alone, authorizations totaled more than \$5 billion. The sales included advanced unmanned aerial systems, long-range missiles and artillery, and anti-ship missiles.

Taiwan’s annual defense budget is more than 2 percent of its gross domestic product. President Tsai Ing-wen has increased the annual figure by modest amounts.

Both U.S. and Taiwanese officials say Taiwanese troops need better training, but each government wants the other to take more responsibility.

“The Taiwanese troops barely have opportunities to conduct exercises with the allies,” said Shu Hsiao-huang, a researcher at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, which is funded by the government of Taiwan. “Military cooperation between Taiwan and the United States should be strengthened in the aspects of regional exercises and the deployment of weapons.”

Ms. Glaser said Taiwan needed to create a strong reserve force and territorial defense force that could wear down an invading military, as the Ukrainians did.

“The U.S. has encouraged Taiwan’s military for years to talk to countries with a robust defense force,” she said. “Taiwan has sent delegations to Israel, Singapore, Finland, Sweden, some of the Baltic States. Now the situation is far more serious and far more urgent. There’s a lot more pressure.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 King Co. executive ‘state of the county’
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/king-county-executive-delivers-state-county-with-plans-build-community/2JH7CLQG4RGOJO6XUHVPPZHYXE/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — King County Executive Dow Constantine delivered the 2022 State of the County address Tuesday.</p> <p>Constantine talked about 2021’s victories and what the future holds in terms of homelessness, public safety and much more as the county is just beginning to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The county executive started with homelessness and called the issue vexing.</p> <p>“This crisis is the most visible, vexing, heartbreaking problem we face as a region. We must act with resolve, purpose, and compassion. In the face of this crisis, we stepped in with a clear plan, resources, and implementation that is working — and we are well on our way to acquiring housing and shelter to bring over 2,000 chronically homeless people off our streets and into a safe place, with more to come,” Constantine said.</p> <p>One of the housing projects Constantine spoke about was the one that broke ground in January at Eastgate in Bellevue, which will offer 360 units of affordable housing.</p>

He even spoke about a former extended-stay hotel that was purchased by the county and opened in April, welcoming 97 residents.

In an effort to take the burden off the behavioral health system, Constantine talked about investing more in housing by creating more bed space for those in need.

“We can’t let decades of state and federal underfunding define our response. I’m looking forward to working with Councilmembers Zahilay and Perry to chart a new course forward to deliver the behavioral health system our community needs,” Constantine said.

He also talked about safety and what it means for every community member to feel safe. Constantine said in part: “We must utilize the full might of county government, not just our police and courts, to address inequities and systemic failures and craft a new approach to public safety.”

Constantine plans to introduce funding this fall that will build better infrastructure and buy equipment such as body cameras for the sheriff’s office.

“Let’s make sure we, our officers and the public can always have access to the objective facts,” Constantine said. “Accountability is at the core of public safety. People who break that compact — who violate the law, who do harm to others — must be accountable for their actions. We can embrace that notion while remaking historical practices and old systems to reflect today’s values.”

Constantine also targeted gun violence, as it is up in the county.

“Our teams are intervening with high-risk individuals, connecting with community-based supports to prevent shootings and seeking to repair the damage done by guns in our community.”

Another issue that was at the forefront was equity and anti-racism.

“We declared racism a public health crisis, and now we are working with the Gathering Collaborative, to take our commitment and make it real. Residents are working together to determine how to invest \$25 million in federal funds to begin unwinding the harms of racism compounded by the pandemic.”

While talking about public safety, Constantine mentioned Pattie Cole-Tindall, who was confirmed as the county’s new sheriff.

She is the first person of color to serve as sheriff in King County’s history, and the first appointed sheriff since the position was changed from an elected to an appointed position in 2020.

Constantine also hit on climate change, in which he said “cutting carbon is job one.”

One way he said emissions can be cut in the county is through the conversion of public transit buses to an all-electric fleet, reaching zero emissions by 2035.

“This spring we took delivery of the first 60-foot articulated battery-electric buses, and inaugurated our new battery bus charging facility at Metro’s South Base in Tukwila.”

Constantine ended his address by summoning the strength, the vision and purpose to deliver for all, as he said it has been a two-and-a-half-year battle with the pandemic, saying he understands people are “weary” but it is no time to give up.

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To see the county executive’s address in full, [click here](#).

HEADLINE 05/24 No link school incident to 11yr-old’s death

SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/report-11-year-olds-death-not-linked-school-incident/7E3ESWR6S5EW5BP67Q6QWEAE64/
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — The Pierce County Medical Examiner has ruled that the death of an 11-year-old girl was not related to a school incident.</p> <p>That information was shared by the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department at a Franklin Pierce school board meeting.</p> <p>“It’s not the result of blunt force trauma or things like that you would expect, a concussion with brain swelling, bruising that would cause someone to die in their sleep. That is not what has occurred. That is what the report is saying,” said Sgt. Darren Moss with the sheriff’s department.</p> <p>Lenyia Swansey Fa’afiti was found unresponsive in her bed last week after an incident she was involved at Ford Middle School.</p> <p>An ambulance took the Lenyia to the hospital, where she died a few days later.</p> <p>When deputies investigated, they said the girl’s parents reported that she had been assaulted while attending school earlier last week.</p> <p>Franklin Pierce school officials confirmed she was a student in the district after receiving a video of an incident on campus. That video, which school officials described as an assault or an altercation, was passed on to investigators.</p> <p>Deputies told KIRO 7 that they did not receive a report about the alleged assault until they were notified by the school district.</p> <p>Moreover, district employees said they didn’t know about the case until after the girl was hospitalized.</p> <p>The exact cause of Lenyia’s death has not been released.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Recall: Hyundai cars
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/hyundai-recall-exploding-seat-belt-parts-accents-elantras/507-237b4593-ff73-4591-914d-1544a4ef0909
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Hyundai is recalling 239,000 cars in the U.S. because the seat belt pretensioners can explode and injure vehicle occupants. Three injuries have been reported, two in the U.S. and one in Singapore.</p> <p>In a letter to the Korean automaker, government regulators said that the driver’s and front passenger’s seat belt pretensioners can explode upon deployment and send shrapnel throughout the vehicle. Pretensioners tighten the belts in preparation for a crash.</p> <p>The recall, which expands and replaces three previous recalls, includes 2019-2022 Accents, 2021-2023 Elantras and 2021-2022 Elantra HEVs, or hybrid electric vehicles. Vehicles repaired under the previous recalls will need to be brought to dealerships again for the new remedy.</p> <p>Owners will be able to take their recalled vehicles to dealerships where the seat belt pretensioners will be fit with a cap at no cost. Hyundai is expected to notify owners by July 15, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration said.</p> <p>For more information, owners may contact Hyundai customer service at 1-855-371-9460 and reference recall number 229. They can also call the NHTSA vehicle safety hotline at 1-888-327-4236 or go to www.nhtsa.gov.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Vancouver PD reaches settlement with DOJ
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/doj-vancouver-police-to-improve-services-for-deaf-people
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — The police department in Vancouver, Washington, has agreed to improve services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing as part of a settlement reached Tuesday with the U.S. Justice Department.</p> <p>Federal authorities became involved after receiving a complaint from a deaf woman who said she was denied services that would allow her to communicate with and understand officers during her arrest and interrogation.</p> <p>Officers knew she was deaf when they responded to the call that led to her arrest, but they did not bring a sign language interpreter. Instead, she said, police required her minor daughter to act as an interpreter.</p> <p>Further, the woman had her hands cuffed behind her during her transport to jail, preventing her from communicating at all.</p> <p>In the settlement the Vancouver Police Department agreed to pay the woman \$30,000 and to update its policies and procedures to make sure those who are deaf or hard of hearing can effectively communicate and receive equal access to services in their encounters with Vancouver police.</p> <p>The woman is identified only by her initials, E.H., in the settlement documents, which also did not detail the reasons for her arrest. However, the U.S. attorney's office in Seattle noted that the investigation further revealed that Vancouver police failed to provide a qualified interpreter to the alleged victim of the incident, who is also deaf.</p> <p>"Law enforcement encounters are some of the most high-stakes and personally significant moments a person can experience," Tessa Gorman, the first assistant U.S. attorney in Seattle, said in a statement. "It is critically important that individuals be able to effectively communicate in these moments – both to provide information to the police and to receive information about their rights."</p> <p>The settlement notes that the Vancouver Police Department cooperated fully with the investigation. Under the deal's terms, the department will provide the U.S. Attorney's Office with draft policy revisions improve communication with those who are deaf or hard of hearing.</p> <p>The department agreed to modify its restraint and handcuffing policy so that detainees who are deaf or hard of hearing can communicate using American Sign Language or in writing by having their hands in front of their bodies.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney's Office will monitor the department's compliance with the settlement for the next two years.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 WA first presumptive case monkeypox
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/what-to-know-about-the-monkeypox-outbreak-and-was-first-presumptive-case/
GIST	<p>Public health officials reported the first presumptive case of monkeypox in Washington state on Monday.</p> <p>Public Health – Seattle & King County is investigating the case in a King County man, who recently traveled to a country with confirmed monkeypox cases, though health officials declined to provide additional details about the patient and the country during a Monday news briefing.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will confirm the presumptive monkeypox case, according to state and local health officials.</p>

Though monkeypox is rarely identified outside of Africa, as of Saturday, 92 confirmed cases and 28 suspected cases of [monkeypox](#) were under investigation in 12 countries, the [World Health Organization](#) reported.

King County public health officer Dr. Jeff Duchin on Monday said the public shouldn't be concerned at this time, though they should be aware and monitor for symptoms and unexplained rashes.

Here's what to know about the global outbreak and the presumptive case in Washington.

What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a viral illness uncommon in the U.S, but as of Monday morning, the CDC had identified one confirmed and four other presumptive monkeypox cases in the U.S.

There are two strains of monkeypox, known as the Congo Basin and West African strains. The monkeypox outbreaks reported so far have been linked to the West African strain, which has a lesser mortality rate of the two strains, Duchin said Monday.

The disease belongs to the same virus family as smallpox, but its symptoms are milder. People usually recover within two to four weeks without hospitalization, but the disease can be deadly.

Monkeypox can affect anyone, and those who are most at risk are those who have had close physical contact with someone with monkeypox. In the recent surge, cases have been reported to be especially prevalent among men who have had close or intimate contact with other men, Duchin said, though the risk is not limited to men who have sex with men.

How is it spread?

While the virus has not easily spread from person to person in past outbreaks, transmission between people appears to be common in the latest confirmed cases, Duchin said.

Monkeypox can be transmitted through contact of bodily fluids from an infected person, sores, rashes or through infected items such as clothing or bedding.

Prolonged face-to-face contact with an infected person could also lead to transmission through respiratory droplets entering the eyes or mouth, according to Duchin.

In parts of central and West Africa where monkeypox has been reported, people are usually exposed to the disease from bites or scratches from rodents and small mammals, preparing wild game, or contact with an infected animal or animal products, according to health department.

What are the symptoms?

The disease can be serious and present complications, especially for those who are immunocompromised, pregnant or very young.

Monkeypox cases reported so far in the latest outbreak have been generally mild or moderate and there have been no deaths linked to the disease, Duchin said.

The illness typically lasts for two to four weeks, according to the CDC. The time from infection to symptoms is usually seven to 17 days, but can range from five to 21 days.

Initial symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Backache
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Chills

- Exhaustion

Within three days of the onset of a fever, people develop a rash on the face, body or groin area that then spreads. Similar to smallpox, lesions can scar.

Is there treatment?

Currently, there is no proven, safe treatment for monkeypox, [according to the CDC](#).

However, smallpox vaccine, antiviral drugs and immunoglobulins used against smallpox have shown to be effective in this disease.

The smallpox vaccine is about 85% effective at preventing monkeypox, [according to WHO](#).

When should I contact a health care provider?

People should seek medical evaluation if they notice new rashes characterized by sores, bumps or fluid-filled bumps.

People who have traveled to central or West African countries, European countries, or other regions with confirmed cases a month prior to the onset of symptoms should contact a health care provider, according to Public Health – Seattle & King County.

Additionally, individuals with symptoms who have had contact with someone with a confirmed or suspected case of monkeypox or should consult a health care provider.

King County residents who suspect they may be infected are asked to contact Public Health – Seattle & King County at 206-296-4774.

Patients can be evaluated in the [county's sexual health clinic](#), housed at Harborview Medical Center, which is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Tuesday from 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

What are preventive measures?

The CDC recommends:

- Avoiding contact with animals that could harbor the virus, including sick or dead animals in areas where monkeypox occurs.
- Avoiding contact with any materials, such as bedding, that has been in contact with a sick animal.
- Isolating infected persons from others who could be at risk for infection.
- Practicing good hand hygiene after contact with infected animals or humans, like washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Using personal protective equipment when caring for patients.

What do we know about presumptive case in Washington?

There is no suspected outbreak in the state and health officials do not believe there's been a high risk exposure, Duchin said during the Monday news conference. As of Monday, less than a dozen people had close contact with the King County patient while he was infectious.

He has not been hospitalized and is recovering at home, where he is quarantining.

Local health officials alerted the CDC and other agencies and will continue to watch for additional cases or potential exposure.

Does this rise to the level of a pandemic?

While news of monkeypox cases might lead some to worry that the outbreak could herald another pandemic, confirmed cases reported in various countries have currently not been epidemiologically linked.

While investigations are ongoing, as of May 13, there is currently no “established travel link” appearing between cases reported and the regions where monkeypox is prevalent, WHO said.

Public health officials are still gathering information and the CDC is also tracking multiple clusters of monkeypox that have been reported in early- to mid-May.

On Sunday, President Joe Biden said the [monkeypox threat, though concerning, doesn’t rise to the level of COVID-19](#).

While there may be a significant number of additional cases reported, it is unlikely that it will result in another global pandemic or “anything like we’re seeing with COVID-19.” Duchin said Monday, calling the timing an “unfortunate coincidence.”

Where have cases been reported?

Several cases of monkeypox in the U.S. were confirmed to WHO [between May 13 and May 21](#), according to the agency.

A Massachusetts man who had recently traveled to Canada was the [first case of the rare virus](#) detected in the U.S. this year. The CDC confirmed his positive test Wednesday.

On Thursday, the New York City Department of Health announced that it was investigating a possible monkeypox case after a patient tested positive for orthopoxvirus — the family of viruses to which monkeypox belongs.

Another presumptive case was also being investigated in Broward County in South Florida on Sunday, also believed to related to international travel.

The Salt Lake County Health Department in Utah said it was investigating two “probable cases” among two adults in the same household, who became infected after traveling internationally to an area currently experiencing monkeypox outbreaks earlier this month.

As of Saturday, the WHO had reported a total of [92 confirmed cases and 28 suspected cases](#) across 12 different countries, including the U.S., Canada and Australia.

European countries with confirmed cases include Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, according to the agency.

Between January and May, 1,238 cases and 57 deaths linked to monkeypox were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, WHO said. Around the same time period, 46 cases were reported in Nigeria.

Between mid-December and late February, 25 cases and less than five deaths were reported in Cameroon, and between March and April, six cases and less than five deaths were reported in the Central African Republic.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Housing market: 2 cities ‘most popular’
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/report-americas-most-popular-housing-markets-for-early-2022-includes-2-wa-cities/
GIST	<p>Hopeful homebuyers are setting their sights on Woodinville.</p> <p>Zillow ranked the city of 13,000 residents northeast of Seattle as the country’s “most popular” housing market for the early part of 2022. The ranking is based on Zillow page views, home prices and other metrics.</p>

Another Washington city made the list, too: Edmonds ranked No. 5.

Suburban cities in other states, from California to Florida, rounded out the top 10.

All of the top cities are about a half-hour from a city center, helping to “paint a picture of how remote work has changed the U.S. housing landscape,” wrote Zillow economist Nicole Bachaud.

Interest in the suburbs — whether for more space or lower prices — has been a driving force in the local housing market since the start of the pandemic, with some areas outside of Seattle seeing home prices jump 20% to 30% in one year.

Even so, the housing market has begun to cool this spring as mortgage interest rates have spiked. Last month, [fewer new homes](#) hit the market in the Seattle area and more were still for sale at the end of the month than at the same time last year. Zillow’s analysis focused on the first three months of the year.

Single-family homes in the area covering Juanita and Woodinville sold for a median of \$1.46 million last month, a 39% increase from the same month last year, according to data from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. That’s higher than the \$1 million median in Seattle, which is up 17% from a year earlier.

Homebuyers are drawn to Woodinville’s combination of large lot sizes, a semirural feel and amenities such as wineries and restaurants, said Ryan Wilkerson, a John L. Scott broker who lives and works in Woodinville.

“That living is really attractive to a lot of people and it’s become even more so as we had pandemic lockdowns and work from home,” Wilkerson said.

Compared to Seattle, both more affordable and more expensive suburbs have seen big price jumps.

In Auburn, for example, the median price is \$670,000 and prices are up 25% year over year. In Kirkland and Bridle Trails, where the median home sold for nearly \$2.3 million, prices are up 43%.

Similar trends have played out for renters, with monthly costs [climbing in the suburbs](#) early in the pandemic.

Among Wilkerson’s clients: tech workers moving up from their first house in the area to something more spacious.

“We see a lot of those people coming our way with a bunch of equity from their house in Kirkland or Bellevue or Redmond,” he said.

But, like in other parts of the region, sky-high prices in Woodinville are squeezing buyers with less to spend.

“I’ve seen tons of people be able to retire early or have life-changing wealth growth” from the hot housing market, Wilkerson said. “And then I work with first-time homebuyers and it’s very difficult for them to afford anything.”

Zillow’s rankings are based on average daily page views of home listings on its site from January through March; increases in home values compared to the previous year and the previous quarter; the rate of houses listed for sale compared to total housing units; and the increase in listings from late last year (when the market is typically slower) to early 2022. The ranking excludes cities with fewer than 100 homes listed for sale.

In the city of Woodinville, 147 properties were listed in the first three months of this year, up about 11% from the final quarter of last year, and page views per listing were up 40%, according to Zillow. Edmonds saw 196 listings, up 32%, and page views were up 70%.

	<p>Those increases are signs of a typical spring uptick, when sellers list more homes and buyers go shopping. Still, the market cooldown is likely to arrive in the suburbs, too.</p> <p>In the Juanita/Woodinville area, almost twice as many homes were still listed for sale at the end of April as at the same time last year, and the number of pending sales was flat, according to Multiple Listing Service data. Pending sales in the Edmonds area were down about 18%.</p> <p>In late 2021, Zillow competitor Redfin ranked its “hottest neighborhoods” for the coming year. In that ranking, based on page views, days on market and other factors, no Washington cities made the top 10. Eight of the 10 were in Florida.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Seattle council okays \$1.15M for SPD hiring
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-city-council-oks-1-5-million-for-police-hiring-incentives-despite-calls-more-law-enforcement-reforms/
GIST	<p>Two years into sustained calls for police reform across the country in response to the killing of George Floyd, residents pleaded with the Seattle City Council, which once committed to divesting from the city's police department, to vote against spending over \$1 million in police hiring incentives and recruitment efforts.</p> <p>“Tomorrow marks the second anniversary of the police killing of George Floyd, yet this afternoon, the council is spending its time figuring out how to incentivize hiring more police, without having done anything in the last two years to hold police more accountable,” said Howard Gale, an organizer of police oversight activist group SeattleStop.org.</p> <p>“Accountability needs to come before incentives, or else we’re going to repeat the violence of 2020,” Gale added.</p> <p>Gale was one of about 20 residents to call into the council’s business meeting Tuesday in opposition to a plan to free up unspent Seattle Police Department money to fund hiring incentives and recruitment for the department, amid a struggle to recruit and retain new police officers.</p> <p>Throughout the public comment period, callers implored council members to spend the money on various social services and alternative public safety responses, rather than providing funds to the department which continues to exhibit racial disparities in force.</p> <p>“Both fiscal responsibility and the voices of the community at large demand that public money should be spent on evidence-based and community-centered public safety solutions rather than repeating the ineffective spending decisions that we’ve made in the past,” resident Brittney Bush Bollay said.</p> <p>Despite opposition to the legislation, council greenlit a resolution by Councilmember Sara Nelson, establishing the council’s intent to approve a yet unwritten hiring incentive plan for Seattle Police.</p> <p>Then, the body also approved an ordinance by Councilmember Lisa Herbold, which partially lifts a budget provision established in November, freeing up \$1.15 million of \$4.5 million in projected unspent salary savings in the SPD budget to be used for recruitment.</p> <p>The incentives would be used to attract new officers to the Seattle Police Department, which has experienced a net loss of 255 officers since 2020.</p> <p>While the ordinance does not spell out a specific incentive plan, it releases funds for a future plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to \$650,000 for moving expenses for new officers hired in 2022, “provided that the Seattle Department of Human Resources amends the City’s Personnel Rules to allow greater flexibility for

appointing authorities to offer moving assistance to a broader range of positions and circumstances and to pay for the salary and benefits for an additional recruiter in SPD.”

- Up to \$350,000 for a national campaign to advertise officer positions
- And up to \$150,000 to fund the [city’s search for a permanent police chief](#)

The dual legislation comes after weeks of Nelson and Herbold planning [separate approaches to the department’s hiring issues](#), but still, the City Council must approve a future hiring incentive [plan that is yet to be written](#) by Mayor Bruce Harrell.

Nelson said she is “ambivalent” toward what about how the money should be spent, as long as it helps attract quality police recruits.

“It could be used for hiring bonuses, retention bonuses, educational stipends, child care. Frankly, whatever. I don’t care what it’s used for,” Nelson said. “What I want is for a staffing incentive program to be developed — ideally with collaboration between the executive and council — that ends up being the most competitive we can get to attract recruits.”

Herbold encouraged her colleagues to be flexible as an incentive plan is approved, emphasizing that the decisions made Tuesday only free up the money to be used if Harrell’s plan is approved, and not trigger any specific incentives.

“Just because we talk about an intent to consider a recommendation that is going to come to us later, doesn’t mean that we’re giving a blank check for it,” Herbold said.

“I would really urge us not to harden our positions around this issue.”

Councilmembers Tammy Morales, Teresa Mosqueda, and Kshama Sawant argued that in a year when the city is expecting a [significant budget shortfall](#), unspent salary savings could go further to address the wants and needs of the public.

“If we really want to increase public safety, there are better ways that we could spend \$4.5 million,” Morales said, noting that the city could invest in safe drug consumption sites, tiny house villages, permanent supportive housing units, back rent payments for struggling tenants, or other social investments.

“The point is there are any number of ways to increase long-term community safety for our neighbors, and one-time hiring bonuses isn’t it,” Morales said.

The council voted 6-3 on both items, with Councilmembers Morales, Mosqueda and Sawant opposed. Councilmembers Herbold, Nelson, Alex Pedersen, Andrew Lewis, Dan Strauss and Council President Debora Juarez voted in favor.

A spokesperson for Harrell did not provide any update on the timing or content of an incentive plan Tuesday, but referred to a previous statement which stated the mayor’s office was developing a “comprehensive recruitment strategy” which will include “more specifically targeted incentives like a relocation bonus and education benefits” for SPD.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Forecast: Pacific Northwest cold, wet June
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/weather-news/article261746212.html
GIST	<p>Pack a raincoat if you’re traveling this Memorial Day weekend and keep it nearby for the first part of June.</p> <p>Saturday’s warm and sunny skies across western Washington were just a reminder of how nice weather can be in the Pacific Northwest. The sequel might not arrive until summer.</p>

According to the National Weather Service in Seattle, colder than normal temperatures and more rain than usual are forecast through early June.

MEMORIAL DAY TRAVEL

Tuesday and Wednesday will give western Washington residents a chance to dry out before windshield wipers come on for Memorial Day weekend travelers. A pair of weather systems will bring rain through the weekend, beginning Thursday, the Weather Service said.

This weekend, expect high temperatures in the 60s across the lowlands and in the mid-50s along the coast.

Travel experts are predicting huge numbers of travelers at airports and on highways this weekend. The AAA expects 39 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from their homes despite historic gas prices.

LONG-TERM WEATHER OUTLOOK

Expect at least the first week of June to be wetter than normal. You might want to layer up underneath that raincoat.

There is a 60-70 percent chance that below normal temperatures will continue for the region through June 17, according to the Weather Service. Precipitation is looking about average during that same period.

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HEADLINE	05/24 US blocks Russia bond payments; default?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/politics/russian-debt-treasury.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration will start blocking Russia from paying American bondholders, increasing the likelihood of the first default of Russia's foreign debt in more than a century.</p> <p>An exemption to American sanctions has allowed Russia to keep paying its debts since February. But that carve out will expire on Wednesday, and the United States will not extend it, according to a notice published by the Treasury Department on Tuesday. As a result, Russia will no longer be able to pay interest it owes on billions of dollars in debt held by American investors. As a result, Russia will be unable to make billions of dollars of debt and interest payments on bonds held by foreign investors.</p> <p>Biden administration officials had debated whether to extend what's known as a general license, which has allowed Russia to pay interest on the debt they sold, but officials ultimately determined that a Russian default would not have a significant impact on the global economy and allowed it to lapse.</p> <p>Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said at a news conference last week that the exemption was created to allow for an "orderly transition" so that investors could sell securities. It was always intended to be for a limited time, she said. She noted that Russia's ability to borrow has already essentially been cut off.</p> <p>"If Russia is unable to find a legal way to make these payments, and they technically default on their debt, I don't think that really represents a significant change in Russia's situation," Ms. Yellen said. "They're already cut off from global capital markets, and that would continue."</p> <p>Although the economic impact of a Russian default might be minimal, it was an outcome that Russia had been trying to avoid and represents an escalation of U.S. sanctions. Russia has already unsuccessfully attempted to make bond payments in rubles and has threatened to take legal action, arguing that it should not be in default if it is not allowed to make payments.</p> <p>"We can only speculate what worries the Kremlin most about defaulting: the stain on Putin's record of economic stewardship, reputational damage, the financial and legal dominoes a default sets in motion, and so on," said Tim Samples, a legal studies professor at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business and an expert on sovereign debt. "But one thing is rather clear: Russia was keen to avoid this scenario, willing even to make payments with precious nonsanctioned foreign currency to avoid a major default."</p>

	<p>Russia has two foreign-currency bond payments due on Friday, both of which have clauses in their contracts that allow for repayment in other currencies if “for reasons beyond its control” Russia is unable to make payments in the originally agreed currency.</p> <p>Russia owes about \$71 million in interest payments for a dollar-denominated bond that will mature in 2026. The contract has a provision to be paid in euros, British pounds and Swiss francs. Russia also owes 26.5 million euros in interest payments for a euro-denominated bond that will mature in 2036, which can be paid back in alternative currencies including the ruble. Both contracts have a 30-day grace period for payments to reach creditors.</p> <p>The Russian finance ministry said on Friday that it had sent the funds to its payment agent, the National Settlement Depository, a Moscow-based institution, a week before the payment was due.</p> <p>The finance ministry said it had fulfilled these debt obligations. But more transactions are required with international financial institutions before the payments can reach bondholders.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 ‘Above normal’ Atlantic hurricane season
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/climate/hurricane-2022-forecast-noaa.html
GIST	<p>The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration expects an “above normal” Atlantic hurricane season this year, the agency announced on Tuesday.</p> <p>If that plays out, it would make 2022 the seventh consecutive year with an above-normal Atlantic hurricane season.</p> <p>Rick Spinrad, the NOAA administrator, said at a news conference on Tuesday that the agency’s scientists had calculated a 65 percent chance of an above-normal season, a 25 percent chance of a near-normal season, and a 10 percent chance of a below-normal season.</p> <p>The season is likely to include 14 to 21 named storms, a category that includes all storms with top winds of at least 39 miles per hour. Of those, six to 10 are expected to reach hurricane strength, meaning sustained winds of at least 74 miles per hour. And of that subset, three to six are expected to reach Category 3 or higher, meaning sustained winds of at least 111 miles per hour.</p> <p>But “it only takes one storm to damage your home, neighborhood and community,” Mr. Spinrad said. “Preparedness is key to resilience, and now is the time to get ready for the upcoming hurricane season.”</p> <p>Key factors in the forecast include the ongoing La Niña climatic pattern, unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean, and unusually weak tropical trade winds.</p> <p>Many of the patterns that have led to above-average hurricane seasons, and to other extreme weather, are related to climate change.</p> <p>Climate change is producing more powerful storms, and they dump more water because of heavier rainfall and a tendency to dawdle and meander; rising seas and slower storms can make for higher and more destructive storm surges. But humans play a part in making storm damage more expensive, as well, by continuing to build in vulnerable coastal areas.</p> <p>“We’re seeing such a dramatic change in the type of weather events that we’re facing as a result of climate change,” Deanne Criswell, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, told reporters on Tuesday, emphasizing the need for individual preparedness.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 China youth disillusioned Covid-zero policy
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/business/china-covid-zero.html
GIST	<p>Four years ago, many young Chinese liked to use the hashtag #Amazing China.</p> <p>Two years ago, they said that China was the “A” student in pandemic control and urged the rest of the world, especially the United States, to “copy China’s homework.”</p> <p>Now many believe that they’re the most unlucky generation since the 1980s as Beijing’s persistent pursuit of the zero Covid policy is wreaking havoc. Jobs are hard to find. Frequent Covid testing dictates their lives. The government is imposing more and more restrictions on their individual liberty while pushing them to get married and have more children.</p> <p>“I can’t stand the thought that I will have to die in this place,” said Cheng Xinyu, a 19-year-old writer in the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu, who is thinking of migrating to foreign countries before the government’s iron fist falls on her.</p> <p>She can’t imagine having children in China, either.</p> <p>“I like children, but I don’t dare to have them here because I won’t be able to protect them,” she said, citing concerns like pandemic control workers breaking into apartments to spray disinfectant, killing pets and requiring residents to leave the keys in their apartment door locks.</p> <p>Ms. Cheng is part of a new trend known as the “run philosophy,” or “runxue,” that preaches running away from China to seek a safer and brighter future. She and millions of others also reposted a video in which a young man pushed back against police officers who warned that his family would be punished for three generations if he refused to go to a quarantine camp. “This will be our last generation,” he told the police.</p> <p>His response became an online meme that was later censored. Many young people identified with the sentiment, saying they would be reluctant to have children under the increasingly authoritarian government.</p> <p>“Not bringing children to this country, to this land, will be the most charitable deed I could manage,” wrote a Weibo user under the hashtag #thelastgeneration before it was censored. “As ordinary people who’re not entitled to individual dignity, our reproductive organs will be our last resort,” wrote another Weibo user.</p> <p>The “run philosophy” and the “last generation” are the rallying cries for many Chinese in their 20s and 30s who despair about their country and their future. They are entering the labor force, getting married and deciding whether to have children in one of the country’s bleakest moments in decades. Censored and politically suppressed, some are considering voting with their feet while others want to protest by not having children.</p> <p>This is quite a departure for members of a generation previously known for its nationalistic penchant. They grew up as China rose to become the world’s second-biggest economy. They trolled critics of Beijing’s human rights records and boycotted many Western brands for perceived slights of their motherland.</p> <p>Sometimes they complained about their grueling work schedules and lack of upward social mobility. But if they were less sure of their personal future, they were confident that China would be great again — as their top leader promised.</p> <p>This spring it has become increasingly clear that the government can’t live up to its promises and that the state has different expectations for their lives.</p> <p>A new survey of more than 20,000 people, mostly female between 18 and 31, found that two-thirds of them didn’t want to have children. The government has a different agenda, pushing people to have three children to rejuvenate one of the fastest-aging populations in the world.</p>

Doris Wang, a young professional in Shanghai, said she had never planned to have children in China. Living through the harsh lockdown in the past two months reaffirmed her decision. Children should be playing in nature and with one another, she said, but they're locked up in apartments, going through rounds of Covid testing, getting yelled at by pandemic control workers and listening to stern announcements from loudspeakers on the street.

"Even adults feel very depressed, desperate and unhealthy, not to mention children," she said. "They'll definitely have psychological issues to deal with when they grow up." She said she planned to migrate to a Western country so she could have a normal life and dignity.

Compounding the frustrations, headlines are full of bad news about jobs. There will be more than 10 million college graduates in China this year, a record. But many businesses are laying off workers or freezing head counts as they try to survive the lockdowns and regulatory crackdowns.

Zhaopin.com, a recruiting site, [found](#) that its job prospect index in the first quarter of this year was about half what it was a year earlier and even lower than when the coronavirus first struck in 2020. Graduates who have signed offers will be paid 12 percent less per month on average than last year, the company [reported](#).

A growing number of college graduates are trying to get into graduate schools or pass the increasingly competitive public servant examinations to land a secure government job.

Two-thirds of 131 new recruits of civil servants in Beijing's Chaoyang district in April had a master's or doctoral degree, according to a government [document](#), reflecting an increasing trend. They graduated from top universities in China and around the world, including Peking University, University of Hong Kong, University of Sydney and Imperial College London. Many of them will be doing the most basic government jobs, ones that high school graduates used to fill.

A Ph.D. graduate of particle physics from Peking University will become an urban management officer, or chengguan, according to the report. Chengguan are the [most reviled](#) officials, known for brutalizing beggars, chasing down street vendors and assisting in tearing down people's homes. The contrast is too rich.

One bright spot in the job market is in Covid testing. As Beijing sticks to the zero Covid policy, local governments need a lot of people to staff their numerous testing stations. Henan Province in central China [said](#) in January that it would train 50,000 people this year in Covid testing, disinfecting and public sanitation management. But even a government-run news site [asked](#) what kind of career prospects these jobs offered after the pandemic.

For the young Chinese, the increasingly stringent social controls are equally depressing.

Some students in Changchun in northeastern Jilin Province complained on social media that they couldn't shower for more than 40 days when the city was locked down and had no access to public bathhouses.

Tongji University in Shanghai, known for its engineering and architecture programs, issued detailed instructions on how to use a mobile phone-based queuing system for the toilets and washrooms, according to a document on the system reviewed by The New York Times.

Students would need to press "start" when they left the dorm for the toilet and press "stop" when they returned to avoid having two people in the hallway at the same time, the instructions said. Each toilet run would be allowed a maximum 10 minutes. After eight minutes, the others in the queue could digitally poke the student in the toilet. After 10 minutes, the student would need to explain to the queuing group why it took so long.

Some of the social control mechanisms were never lifted.

In 2020, the prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai developed a tracking system that requires its students to register their health conditions and real-time locations every day. It's similar to systems that some countries, including South Korea, developed to monitor travelers for short-term home and hotel quarantines. Fudan students have had to register in the system daily, doing so even during the year and half when there were very few infections in China. If they fail to do so, they're not allowed onto the campus, according to a step-by-step registering process reviewed by The Times.

Universities have very little tolerance for any act of disobedience.

Sun Jian, a graduate student at Ludong University in eastern Shandong Province, was expelled in late March after he walked around the campus holding a sign saying, "Unlock Ludong." He was also admonished by the police for disturbing the public order.

A college student in Shanghai told me that her adviser had been able to track her down for a critical Weibo comment she made about the lockdowns — even though she had used a pseudonym. She was told to delete the post.

It's impossible to measure how many young Chinese have become disillusioned by the government's iron fist in the latest lockdowns, which have affected hundreds of millions of people. Beijing has complete control over the propaganda outlets, the internet, the text books, the schools and nearly every aspect that could touch the brain waves of the Chinese public.

But the growing online disenchantment is unmistakable. And people will always find ways to escape suppression. In "1984," Winston wrote a diary. In "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," Tomáš and Tereza moved to the countryside.

"When you find that as an individual you have zero ability to fight back the state apparatus, your only way out is to run," said Ms. Wang, the young professional in Shanghai.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Another subvariant dominates cases in US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/24/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#covid-omicron-cases
GIST	<p>Another form of the Omicron subvariant BA.2 has become the dominant version among new U.S. coronavirus cases, according to federal estimates on Tuesday, a development that experts had forecast over the last few weeks.</p> <p>There was no indication yet that the new subvariant, known as BA.2.12.1, causes more severe disease than earlier forms did. BA.2.12.1 made up about 58 percent of all new U.S. cases, according to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the week ending May 21.</p> <p>For the first time since February, the United States recently began averaging more than 100,000 new confirmed cases per day again, according to a New York Times database. Newly reported cases have been rising in nearly every state, many infections go uncounted in official statistics, so the true number of infections may be higher. As of Monday, there were an average of more than 24,700 hospitalizations nationally, an increase of 28 percent over the last two weeks.</p> <p>BA.2.12.1 spreads more rapidly than previous versions of Omicron including the form which sent U.S. cases soaring over the winter. The new version evolved from BA.2, which itself was more contagious than any variant that came before it. New York State health officials said mid-April that the Omicron subvariants known as BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1 accounted for more than 90 percent of new cases in central New York State.</p> <p>Omicron subvariants are also powering the fifth wave of virus cases in New York City, where officials put the city on "high Covid alert" last week, after rising case counts and hospitalizations reached a level that could put substantial pressure on the health care system.</p>

But there was no sign that mask mandates were coming back [in New York City](#), even as [federal health officials warned](#) that [a large share of Americans were living in areas](#) with “medium to high” levels of virus transmission.

[And many Americans should consider wearing masks](#), Dr. Ashish K. Jha, the White House’s new Covid-19 coordinator said. “I feel that very strongly, that in crowded indoor spaces, in places with high transmission, people should be doing that,” he said on ABC’s “This Week” on Sunday. He also emphasized the importance of people getting vaccinated and boosted. “What we know is vaccines continue to provide a high level of protection against people getting seriously ill,” he said.

BA.2, which still makes up about 39 percent of new U.S. cases, according to the latest federal estimates, was [first identified](#) in the United States in December, and it grew to account [for about 55 percent of new U.S. cases near the end of March](#).

Since genetic sequencing of the virus is performed on just a portion of test samples across the country, the latest C.D.C. estimates are subject to revision as more data come in. That is what [happened](#) in late December, when the agency had to significantly decrease its estimate for the nationwide prevalence of the Omicron variant known as BA.1. Before that, the Delta variant [had been dominant](#) in the United States since early summer.

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HEADLINE	05/24 IEA warns Europe: need harsh winter plans
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/business/energy-environment/russia-ukraine-europe-natural-gas.html
GIST	<p>Fatih Birol, the executive director of the International Energy Agency, said Tuesday that he was warning leaders in Europe to create backup plans in case harsh winter weather forced countries to conserve natural gas.</p> <p>“I’m afraid that I cannot exclude the risk this winter that we are facing a rationing of gas,” Mr. Birol said during an interview at the World Economic Forum, the annual gathering of global business leaders in Davos, Switzerland. “I’m advising several European governments to prepare a contingency plan.”</p> <p>Before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia provided nearly 40 percent of the European Union’s gas supply, and 55 percent of Germany’s. “Europe is paying for its over-dependence on Russian energy,” Mr. Birol said.</p> <p>Planning by the European Union to declare an embargo of oil from Russia, which is the world’s third-largest producer of crude, has met stiff resistance from Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary. A gas embargo has so far been taken off the table.</p> <p>German leaders, in particular, have warned that an immediate cutoff of gas would catapult their country’s economy — the largest in Europe — into a recession.</p> <p>A gas embargo would force some industrial sites to shut down, Robert Habeck, Germany’s vice chancellor and economy minister, said in an interview on Monday.</p> <p>“We always have to think about whether the steps we are taking are doing more harm to Putin or to ourselves,” he said, referring to the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin. “If there is a worldwide recession or a recession in Germany, who will help Ukraine then?”</p> <p>A mild winter in Europe would reduce global demand for gas, as would continued Covid-related lockdowns in China, which is the world’s largest consumer of gas.</p> <p>Mr. Birol urged leaders to step up their efforts to promote energy conservation. Simple steps such as turning down thermostats by a few degrees would save a significant amount of gas, as would renovating buildings to make them more energy efficient, he added.</p>

	<p>Frans Timmermans, a European Commission official leading green energy initiatives, echoed those sentiments on Tuesday at an energy panel at Davos.</p> <p>Given that Russia can no longer be relied on to provide fossil fuel, Mr. Timmermans said, “we need to do much better on energy savings.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Study: WA rated as #1 state for millennials
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/wallethub-washington-is-the-no-1-state-in-the-us-for-millennials
GIST	<p>A new WalletHub study found Washington state is the No. 1 state in the country for millennials.</p> <p>The personal-finance website compared all 50 states and the District of Columbia using 34 key metrics, including share of millennials, millennial unemployment rate and millennial voter-turnout rate.</p> <p>Washington state ranked fourth in percentage of millennials and average monthly earnings for millennials. The Evergreen state ranks ninth in percentage of millennials living with parents, 17th in percentage of insured millennials and 19th in millennial unemployment rate.</p> <p>The District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Utah, Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, Wisconsin, Virginia and Colorado rounded out the top 10, respectively.</p> <p>Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, West Virginia and Mississippi ranked Nos. 47-51, respectively.</p>
Return to Top	Click here for the full report from WalletHub.

HEADLINE	05/24 Shopping cart jail: stores face fines
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/shopping-cart-jail-stores-face-fines-to-reclaim-abandoned-carts-even-if-they-were-stolen
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. - It's called shopping cart jail – a fenced in dirt lot hidden among the trees in the City of Federal Way.</p> <p>The carts of all shapes and sizes were found abandoned by city workers on sidewalks, public parks, private and public property and deep in the woods where homeless encampments exist.</p> <p>Its population fluctuates from a couple of dozens to hundreds.</p> <p>They are from Target, Ross, Safeway, Marshalls, T.J.Maxx, nearly every major retailer and supermarket that operates in the city.</p> <p>They are all waiting to be bailed out by the stores. The city charges \$25 dollars each if the stores pick them up from jail.</p> <p>For an additional \$62 dollars, the city will delivered back to the store, with an added charge of \$5-\$10 per cart.</p> <p>If the stores don't claim them after 14 days, they will be destroyed, says Interim City Administrator Brian Davis – and the city will bill the store another \$25 for their destruction.</p> <p>"The intent of the program was to reduce the amount of carts that had been abandoned" says Davis. The City created the impound program in 2018 as an incentive to store owners to pick up abandoned carts littering public areas.</p>

However, in light of an epidemic of unabated shoplifting including the theft of carts and a rising homeless population, some critical of the law want the city to cut the stores a break and give them back to the store for free.

"Give them back like an act of good will because it's penalizing the victims of theft," says David Zumwalt who went into shopping cart jail and posted what he found on Facebook.

He was homeless, living outside in the camps, an addict who stole to support his addiction and is now a drug abuse recovery counselor. He's also part of the citizens group Stand Up Federal way which routine goes and cleans up wetlands where camps were located.

"The drug addicts steal from the store, and then they steal the shopping cart, and they are never held responsible for their actions" he says. "It hurts the consumer because you go to the store there's no carts".

Davis says the program has been effective. The city was picking up an average of 3,000 carts per year using volunteers before the ordinance was passed. It now uses paid staff instead of volunteers and is picking up an average of 2,000 carts per year and averaging \$40,000 in revenue from the fees sit charges.

"We get it but don't necessary like it" say Melinda Merrill with the Northwest Grocers Association. "The problem has gotten a little bit worse with the increase in homelessness".

Many cities have passed similar ordinances and some charge substantially more than Federal Way. Longview also charges a \$25 impound fee while Auburn's is \$30. Renton and Lakewood charge \$100 and if those cities pick up more than 12 carts a month, it's \$200 per cart. Yakima charges \$115 but waives the fee if a cart's anti-theft locking device has been disabled.

Merrill says the industry is moving away from anti-theft locking devices because they are easily disabled.

"There were hundreds and most of them look totally functional," Zumwalt says of the carts in Federal Way's shopping cart jail.

Functional is a key word because all cities have their ordinances the right to destroy the carts if the store doesn't claim their carts in 14 days. There are no provisions to auction them off like an impounded car that is not claimed or donate them to non-profits such as food banks.

"I think it's ridiculous," says Kim Henish, store director of Marlene's Market and Deli. The store recently bought recycled carts from Texas at for just over \$100 a piece instead of paying for brand new one which can run upwards to \$400.

"We take count of our carts every night," she says. "We are a small business, fifty-dollars to destroy a cart is a lot to us, to Target and Safeway and Ross, not so much."

"I understand the reasoning for the fees, but I think they should also take into consideration the business" she says. "We see someone put their belongs in our cart, we don't allow them to do that and take it back."

She says when confront most people give the cart back.

"We pick up every Tuesday and get 35 to 40 carts a day," says John Kalmbach, the Solid Waste Director for the City of Renton and runs the cart retrieval program.

"We are seeing more shopping carts, and I'd say 99 percent are functional good carts and very expensive"

He says some stores do have a retrieval service to round up carts but not all of them. Walmart just paid to get 46 carts back from Renton's shopping cart jail he says. Following the city's law, that could have been as much as \$8,000 if all the carts were pick up in the same month.

Carts that aren't clearly labeled with the stores name go straight for disposal. Kalmback says the city sends the carts to a metal recycler and doesn't not charge the store a disposal fee since it profits from the recycling.

"That's part that makes me really angry" says Henish. "Carts are doing to the dump, it's not environmentally friendly".

"The whole issue is just a bad cycle " says Merrill. "I'm mean this is property that has been stolen from us and we are having to pay because it's been stolen"

The Northwest Grocers Association has created a successful retrial program in Oregon and has plans to expand it to Washington State. It involves special labeling of carts with scanable QR codes for anybody to easily report an abandoned cart. A vendor contract with the Association will pick up the carts on a regular basis. Safeway and Costco have agreed to use the new service she says which will be up and running later this year.

It's gotten to the point the stores can't afford to ignore the issue of abandoned carts because some customers are having trouble finding carts.

"I've been a few grocery stores and there's no carts and I kind of know where some of them might be" says Kalmback.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Charged w/murder, cop on recruiting poster
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/auburn-officer-charged-with-murder-featured-on-departments-recruiting-banner/
GIST	<p>A banner displayed at an Auburn Police Department recruitment booth on Saturday urging would-be cops to "Join Team Auburn PD" uses Officer Jeff Nelson as a poster child, outraging the family of the man Nelson faces a murder charge for killing and raising questions of propriety among police reformers.</p> <p>The banner, at a booth at Auburn's annual Pet Palooza celebration Saturday at Game Farm Park, prominently features Nelson alongside images including one of a SWAT team and an officer firing a handgun.</p> <p>Auburn police spokesperson Kolby Crossley said it was a mistake to use the banner, which he called "old and outdated."</p> <p>"It was what we had," Crossley said. "We won't be using it ever again."</p> <p>Elaine Simons, the foster mother of Jesse Sarey, who was shot by Nelson outside a market following a scuffle in 2019, said Sarey's family was "appalled" when a Pet Palooza attendee passed on a photo of the banner.</p> <p>"How can police officers sit in a recruiting booth right next to a poster showing an officer charged with murder?" Simons asked. "It shows a total disregard to what's going on around them, and is abusive to us and to the families of Isaiah Obet and Brian Scaman," the other two men Nelson has fatally shot since he joined the department in 2008.</p> <p>"It shows a total disregard to all of the victims of police abuse, by this officer and others," Simons said.</p>

The city of Auburn last year paid \$4 million to settle a wrongful-death claim brought by Sarey's family against Nelson and the city. The city also settled a lawsuit filed by Obet's brother for \$1.25 million in 2020, [just a week before Nelson was charged](#) with murder and assault in Sarey's death.

Nelson is on paid leave pending trial, which likely will occur next spring.

The city and Nelson, 43, are defendants in a federal civil rights lawsuit filed last year by Joseph Loren Allen, who was later convicted in a federal drug and illegal firearms investigation and whom Nelson ran down with his patrol car during Allen's 2018 arrest, breaking both his ankles and dislocating his shoulder.

Allen's federal defense attorney obtained hundreds of pages of Nelson's personnel and discipline files during the federal court case, creating an eight-page list detailing 65 incidents from 2011 through 2018 where Nelson used force during arrests, often for nonviolent misdemeanors or other minor crimes, or was offered up for discipline. Records for Nelson's first three years at the department were not provided, according to federal court documents.

Many of the incidents involved dog bites, as Nelson worked as a K-9 officer. Others involved his frequent use of lateral vascular neck restraints, a hold that restricts blood flow to the brain, leading to unconsciousness.

The list also shows Nelson has used a Taser, his fists, his feet and resorted to shooting Scaman in 2011, [Obet in 2017](#) and Sarey in 2019. [All three deadly incidents involved knives and](#) Nelson shot each man in the head, according to court records.

Nelson was charged with Sarey's shooting death after prosecutors determined that he escalated a routine nuisance call into a life-or-death confrontation with the unarmed Sarey, who Nelson said grabbed for his gun and a knife on the officer's vest during a scuffle.

Nelson first shot Sarey in the abdomen, according to the charges. Then, after clearing his weapon of a jammed round, he shot the incapacitated Sarey in the head, prosecutors allege.

Nelson's trial has been delayed by numerous motions, including an attempt by prosecutors to introduce at trial photographs of Nelson's extensive body art and tattoos that prosecutors believe speak to an aggressive approach toward law enforcement. The Seattle Times is seeking to make those photos public.

Some of the available photos show tattoos that contain part of a longtime police and military catchphrase, "Better to be judged by 12 than carried by eight," prosecutors allege.

"This phrase indicates a willingness to use force (including deadly force) and face legal consequences (judged by 12) rather than be carried by pallbearers (carried by 8)," prosecutors have argued.

Leslie Cushman, an Olympia civil rights attorney and director of the Washington Coalition for Police Accountability, said Auburn's decision to use a recruitment banner featuring Nelson left her "wondering just how clueless they are."

"If this was a human resources decision, they clearly don't understand what's going on within that department or a culture that would endorse that message," said Cushman, who was the citizen sponsor of I-940, a 2018 initiative that removed restrictive language in Washington's police deadly force statute, making it easier to prosecute police. It also overhauled the state's officer training system to emphasize de-escalation.

"Because I can assure you Officer Jeff Nelson does not represent the culture they want. It raises real questions about their thinking. How could they make such a grave mistake?"

Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/24 Quad announces cybersecurity initiatives
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/us-australia-india-and-japan-announce-cybersecurity-initiatives-on-software-supply-chains/
GIST	<p>The United States and three allies announced a partnership on Tuesday that will see the countries work together on several cybersecurity initiatives centered around fortifying software, supply chains and user data.</p> <p>U.S. President Joe Biden is currently making his first trip across Asia as president and met in Tokyo with newly-elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan to discuss a range of issues.</p> <p>In a statement released after the meeting, the leaders committed to improving the collective cybersecurity of critical infrastructure by sharing threat information and identifying potential risks in supply chains for digitally-enabled products and services.</p> <p>The partnership will also see the countries join forces on efforts “aligning baseline software security standards for government procurement, leveraging our collective purchasing power to improve the broader software development ecosystem so that all users can benefit.”</p> <p>“The Quad partners will coordinate capacity building programs in the Indo-Pacific region under the Quad Cybersecurity Partnership, and will initiate the first-ever Quad Cybersecurity Day to help individual internet users across our nations, the Indo-Pacific region, and beyond to better protect themselves from cyber threats,” the White House said in a statement.</p> <p>Each country has separately sought to beef up cybersecurity protections in recent years and the joint initiative was criticized heavily by Chinese officials, who told CNN that the U.S. was trying to stoke “geopolitical rivalry” with an “Indo-Pacific NATO.”</p> <p>Each country has faced severe issues with China-linked hackers. Last month, Indian officials accused China of attempting to hack seven facilities managing the electricity grid in Northern India.</p> <p>Last year, Australia and Japan joined with the U.S. in accusing China’s ministry of state security of exploiting Microsoft Exchange software vulnerabilities to hack hundreds of computers and devices.</p> <p>The White House said leaders from all four countries will meet again in Australia next year.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Fronton botnet disinformation punch
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/fronton-botnet-disinformation/179721/
GIST	<p>A fresh look at the Fronton DDoS-focused botnet reveals the criminal tool has more capabilities than previously known.</p> <p>The Fronton botnet first made the headline in March 2020. That is when, according to news reports, a hacktivist group called Digital Revolution said it obtained documents claiming to be from Oday Technologies, allegedly a contractor for Russia’s Federal Security Service.</p> <p>Now the cybersecurity firm Nisos is reporting the Fronton malware goes beyond delivering DDoS attacks and can be used to create massive numbers of social media accounts that can then be used to shape opinion via social media manipulation.</p>

After further analysis of the documents related to Fronton, the Nisos researcher assert that DDoS “is only one of the many capabilities of the system... Nisos analyzed the data and determined that Fronton is a system developed for coordinated inauthentic behavior on a massive scale,” Nisos added.

Working of Fronton

Fronton, researchers say, doubles as a backend infrastructure for the social media disinformation. The malware uses an army of compromised IOT devices to carry out both DDoS attacks and disinformation campaigns.

“This system includes a web-based dashboard known as SANA that enables a user to formulate and deploy trending social media events en masse. The system creates these events that it refers to as Инфоповоды, ‘newsbreaks,’ utilizing the botnet as a geographically distributed transport,” according to researchers.

SANA allows users to create fake social media accounts with generated email and phone numbers, these fake accounts are used to spread content across social networks, blogs and forums, researchers said.

“SANA creates social media persona accounts, including provisioning of an email and phone number,” Nisos explained.

Additionally, researchers note that the platform allows users to control the number of likes, comments, and reactions. As well as provide the “facilities for creating these newsbreaks on a schedule or a reactive basis”, this will track the messages, trends, and their responses.

A response model is specified to perform certain actions after the execution of the Newsbreak. The response model allows the group of bots to react to a piece of particular news in a certain fashion (positive, negative, or neutral), according to the report.

“The response model allows an operator to specify weekly frequency of likes, comments, and reposts. It also allows for the selection of comments from the dictionary lists in order to direct the response patterns of the virtual social group,” Nisos added in a report.

The operators can also specify a minimum frequency of actions and a minimum interval between actions. The researcher also found the platform has “a machine learning (ML) system involved that can be turned on or off based on behavior observed on social media.”

The researcher added that Fronton operators have the capability to control the number of friends a fake bot should maintain, and integrate with a feature to store imagery for the bot.

The usage of the tool in real-world attacks is not clear, and as of April 2022, the web portal is active and moved to a different domain.

“As of April 2022, 0day technologies has changed its domain from 0day[.]ru to 0day[.]llc,” Nisos noted.

Nisos released a complete [research report](#) for further analysis.

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HEADLINE	05/24 New Chaos ransomware builder variant
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/new-chaos-ransomware-builder-variant.html
GIST	Cybersecurity researchers have disclosed details of the latest version of the Chaos ransomware line, dubbed Yashma.

"Though Chaos ransomware builder has only been in the wild for a year, Yashma claims to be the sixth version (v6.0) of this malware," BlackBerry research and intelligence team said in a [report](#) shared with The Hacker News.

Chaos is a customizable ransomware builder that [emerged](#) in underground forums on June 9, 2021, by falsely marketing itself as the .NET version of Ryuk despite sharing no such overlaps with the notorious counterpart.

The fact that it's offered for sale also means that any malicious actor can purchase the builder and develop their own ransomware strains, turning it into a potent threat.

It has since undergone five successive iterations aimed at improving its functionalities: version 2.0 on June 17, version 3.0 on July 5, version 4.0 on August 5, and version 5.0 in early 2022.

While the first three variants of Chaos functioned more like a destructive trojan than traditional ransomware, Chaos 4.0 added further refinements so as to increase the upper limit of files that can be encrypted to 2.1MB.

Version 4.0 has also been actively weaponized by a ransomware collective known as Onyx as of April 2022 by making use of an updated ransom note and a refined list of file extensions that can be targeted.

"Chaos 5.0 attempted to resolve the largest problem of previous iterations of the threat, namely that it was unable to encrypt files larger than 2MB without irretrievably corrupting them," the researchers explained.

Yashma is the latest version to join this list, featuring two new improvements, including the ability to stop execution based on a victim's location and terminate various processes associated with antivirus and backup software.

"Chaos started as a relatively basic attempt at a .NET compiled ransomware that instead functioned as a file-destroyer or wiper," the researchers said. "Over time it has evolved to become a full-fledged ransomware, adding additional features and functionality with each iteration."

The development comes as a Chaos ransomware variant has been spotted [siding with Russia](#) in its ongoing war against Ukraine, with the post-encryption activity leading to an alert containing a link that directs to a website with pro-Russian messages.

"The attacker has no intention of providing a decryption tool or file recovery instructions for its victims to recover their affected files," Fortinet FortiGuard Labs disclosed last week, adding it "makes the malware a file destroyer."

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HEADLINE	05/24 Poisoned Python, PHP packages
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/pypi-package-ctx-and-php-library-phpass.html
GIST	<p>Two trojanized Python and PHP packages have been uncovered in what's yet another instance of a software supply chain attack targeting the open source ecosystem.</p> <p>One of the packages in question is "ctx," a Python module available in the PyPi repository. The other involves "phpass," a PHP package that's been forked on GitHub to distribute a rogue update.</p> <p>"In both cases the attacker appears to have taken over packages that have not been updated in a while," the SANS Internet Storm Center (ISC) said, one of whose volunteer incident handlers, Yee Ching, analyzed the ctx package.</p> <p>It's worth noting that ctx, prior to the latest release on May 21, 2022, was last published to PyPi on December 19, 2014. On the other hand, phpass hasn't received an update since it was uploaded to Packagist on August 31, 2012. Both the libraries have been removed from PyPi and GitHub.</p>

At its core, the modifications are designed to exfiltrate AWS credentials to a Heroku URL named 'anti-theft-web.herokuapp[.]com.' "It appears that the perpetrator is trying to obtain all the environment variables, encode them in Base64, and forward the data to a web app under the perpetrator's control," Ching said.

It's suspected that the attacker managed to gain unauthorized access to the maintainer's account to publish the new ctx version. Further investigation has revealed that the threat actor registered the expired domain used by the original maintainer on May 14, 2022.

"With control over the original domain name, creating a corresponding email to receive a password reset email would be trivial," Ching added. "After gaining access to the account, the perpetrator could remove the old package and upload the new backdoored versions."

Coincidentally, on May 10, 2022, security consultant Lance Vick [disclosed](#) how it's possible to purchase lapsed NPM maintainer email domains and subsequently use them to re-create maintainer emails and seize control of the packages.

What's more, a [metadata analysis](#) of 1.63 million JavaScript NPM packages conducted by academics from Microsoft and North Carolina State University last year uncovered 2,818 maintainer email addresses associated with expired domains, effectively allowing an attacker to hijack 8,494 packages by taking over the NPM accounts.

"In general, any domain name can be purchased from a domain registrar allowing the purchaser to connect to an email hosting service to get a personal email address," the researchers said. "An attacker can hijack a user's domain to take over an account associated with that email address."

Should the domain of a maintainer turn out to be expired, the threat actor can acquire the domain and alter the DNS mail exchange ([MX](#)) records to appropriate the maintainer's email address.

"Looks like the phpass compromise happened because the owner of the package source - 'hautelook' deleted his account and then the attacker claimed the username," independent researcher Somdev Sangwan [said](#) in a series of tweets, detailing what's called a [repository hijacking](#) attack.

Public repositories of open source code such as Maven, NPM, Packages, PyPi, and RubyGems are a critical part of the software supply chain that many organizations rely on to develop applications.

On the flip side, this has also made them an attractive target for a variety of adversaries seeking to deliver malware.

This includes [typosquatting](#), [dependency confusion](#), and account takeover attacks, the latter of which could be leveraged to ship fraudulent versions of legitimate packages, leading to widespread supply chain compromises.

"Developers are blindly trusting repositories and installing packages from these sources, assuming they are secure," DevSecOps firm JFrog [said](#) last year, adding how threat actors are using the repositories as a malware distribution vector and launch successful attacks on both developer and CI/CD machines in the pipeline.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Web app attacks in healthcare on rise
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/application-security/web-app-attacks-on-the-rise-in-healthcare-as-insider-challenges-remain

GIST

Basic web application attacks, miscellaneous errors and system intrusions were behind 76% of healthcare data breaches in 2021, according to the annual Verizon Data Breach Investigations report. These leading threats were the same in last year's report, but web apps now dominate the breach trends.

It's the third year in a row where external threat actors outpaced insiders as the leading cause of healthcare security incidents and breaches following multiple, consecutive years where [insiders were the leading breach cause](#), particularly misbehaving employees.

Although external threats now dominate, it doesn't mean that healthcare has conquered its insider challenges. The researchers stressed that "errors are a significant problem" for healthcare.

"Make no mistake," researchers wrote, "your employees are still causing breaches, but they are more than two and a half times more likely to make an error than to maliciously misuse their access."

The DBIR team analyzed 23,896 security incidents, including 5,212 confirmed data breaches across all sectors. Among the analyzed incidents, healthcare accounted for 849 reported security incidents, 571 of which had confirmed data disclosures.

Of these incidents, 36 were tied to small entities and 14 to large organizations. The entity size for the remaining 799 incident was unknown. For breaches, 14 were tied to smaller providers, 10 to large entities, and the size of the remaining entities is unknown.

For healthcare, the rise in web app attacks is driving the rate of external threats. It's a notable stat, as the rise in these attacks did not begin until 2019 and it has "clearly become a serious problem for everyone, not just this industry."

"Healthcare has increasingly become a target of run-of-the-mill hacking attacks and the more impactful ransomware campaigns (both from the System Intrusion pattern, which came in third)," according to the report. "With [the increase in ransomware](#), comes the associated increase of the discovery method of actor disclosure."

Further, the report showed 61% of data breaches were caused by external threat actors, compared with 39% of internal actors. The majority of data breaches were driven by financial motives (95%), with espionage trailing far behind with 4% of breach incidents.

Attacks driven by convenience or grudges each accounted for 1% of the total breaches across the sector. The report showed 58% of these incidents led to the compromise of personal data, with medical data compromised in 46% of breaches and 29% led to credential theft. It's the second year in a row that personal data was compromised more than health information.

The report also examined privilege misuse across all sectors, which found healthcare is the most common industry represented in this pattern. These incidents are overwhelmingly caused by insiders, where the primary goal is to use legitimate access to steal data. The report confirms most privilege misuse incidents lead to successful data breaches.

In these situations, the actor "looks to capitalize on their access" by finding customer, employee, and partner data. Given the prevalence of privilege misuse in healthcare, the researchers note that it's no surprise medical data is taken in 22% of privilege misuse incidents.

"Healthcare has had an ongoing problem with internal actors accessing their data without a valid reason for a long time. ... While it is no longer in the top tier of the patterns in healthcare, it should not be discounted as a solved problem," according to the report.

Data mishandling is also tied to privilege misuse and is driven by "convenience," or when an employee performs an unsafe action to get around a security control meant to prevent the exposure of data. These

	<p>controls make it harder to complete their work. As such, “it’s important to pair these controls with education to at least let people know the ‘why’ behind the process.”</p> <p>Organizations that repeatedly suffer these types of events should consider “offering a less laborious process that remains secure,” the researchers noted. The report also revealed that medical data is compromised in 43% of lost or stolen assets and 18% of all misconfiguration incidents.</p> <p>The report confirms the recent Senate testimony from I am the Cavalry Founder Josh Corman that stressed the sector’s “dependence on connected technology was growing faster than our ability to secure it, in areas affecting public safety, human life and national security,” particularly as there are a host of free resources and entities focused on healthcare security challenges.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Hackers can ‘pre-hijack’ online accounts
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/hackers-can-pre-hijack-online-accounts-they-are-created-users
GIST	<p>Threat actors could gain access to users’ online accounts by leveraging a new type of technique that involves pre-hijacking an account before it’s actually registered by the victim.</p> <p>“Account pre-hijacking” is a new class of attacks that can be used to gain access to a targeted account, and many online services could be vulnerable.</p> <p>Account pre-hijacking was analyzed by independent researcher Avinash Sudhodanan and Andrew Paverd of the Microsoft Security Response Center. Microsoft funded the project through a grant that offered up to \$75,000 for proposals on improving the security of its identity solutions.</p> <p>Compromised accounts are involved in many attacks, but the targeted accounts are taken over by the attacker after they are created. In pre-hijacking attacks, the attacker predicts which online service will be used by the targeted individual and conducts certain activities before the victim creates an account.</p> <p>These attacks can involve federated identity and single sign-on (SSO) services, which allow users to sign up for certain online services using existing accounts registered with companies such as Microsoft, Google and Facebook.</p> <p>In a research paper published last week, Sudhodanan and Paverd described five types of pre-hijacking attack methods. In one type of attack, the hacker creates an account using the victim’s email address, and the victim later signs up for the same website using a federated identity service. If the website is not capable of merging the two accounts securely, both the attacker and the victim could have access to the account.</p> <p>This could also work if the attacker registers an account using a federated identity while the victim creates an account on the same website using the classic registration process.</p> <p>Another method involves unexpired session identifiers. The attacker creates an account with the victim’s email address and maintains a long-running active session. The legitimate user can reset the password in order to gain access to the account, but the attacker could still maintain access if their session has not been invalidated following the password reset.</p> <p>An attacker could also create an account and add a so-called “trojan identifier” that would later give them access to an account. This can be a secondary email address or phone number where password reset or one-time authentication links are sent.</p> <p>Another interesting technique starts with the attacker initiating the process of changing an account’s email address to an address they control. This process typically involves a verification URL being sent to the new address. However, the attacker only completes the verification process at a later date, enabling them to regain access to an account after it has been used by the victim for a certain period of time.</p>

The researchers have analyzed 75 popular services and found that at least 35 of them were vulnerable to one or more account pre-hijacking attacks. The list includes popular social media, cloud storage, video conferencing, and blogging services. Affected vendors were notified between March and September 2021, but many online services could still be vulnerable.

While these methods can be used against individual users, the researchers believe they could also be leveraged to target an entire organization. For instance, the attacker could sign up for a service that is gaining popularity using previously leaked accounts. In attacks aimed at an organization, if the attacker knows that they plan on using a particular service in the future, they could create accounts with publicly available email addresses.

“Fundamentally, the root cause of account pre-hijacking vulnerabilities is that the service fails to verify that the user actually owns the supplied identifier (e.g. email address or phone number) before allowing use of the account,” the researchers explained. “Although many services require identifier verification, they often do so asynchronously, allowing the user (or attacker) to use certain features of the account before the identifier has been verified. Whilst this might improve usability, it creates a window of vulnerability for pre-hijacking attacks.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Russia, Ukraine personal data exposed
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/personal-data-russians-ukrainians-exposed-online/
GIST	<p>SafetyDetectives security team led by Anurag Sen shared details of a misconfigured Elasticsearch server that exposed the data of millions of loan applicants. The data mainly belonged to people from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Russia who had applied for microloans.</p> <p>The server was detected randomly on December 5th, 2021, while checking certain IPs however the details of it have only been shared this week. The anonymous server was left unsecured and unprotected as it didn't have any authentication protocols, which led to the leaking of more than 870 million records or 147GB of data.</p> <p>Owner Identity Yet Not Available</p> <p>SafetyDetectives couldn't determine who owned the server. However, researchers noted that customer logs of numerous microloans providers' websites were stored on the server, but most weren't financial services like lenders or banks. Instead, these websites were of third parties that are intermediaries between the loan company and the applicant.</p> <p>Most entries in the server's logs were in the Russian language, while most data belonged to Russians. Therefore, researchers concluded that the server's owner is a Russian entity.</p> <p>Details of Exposed Data</p> <p>According to SafetyDetectives researchers, different forms of personally identifiable information (PII) and sensitive user data got exposed in this leak, including details of users' "internal passports" and other forms of data.</p> <p>It is worth noting that In Russia and Ukraine, internal passports are used as the substitute for national IDs and are used within the country's territories. According to SafetyDetectives's blog post, the internal passport details contained in the exposed server include the following information of users:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender• Marital status• Date and place of birth• The physical address, including city and region• Full name with first name, last name, and patronymic name• Passport number with issue/expiry dates and serial number

Some of the exposed data, such as cities, names, addresses, and issued by locations, were written in Cyrillic script, which is primarily used in some parts of Asia and Europe.

In some instances, this information was decoded into certain symbols. Other PII details exposed by the unsecured server include the following:

- Salary
- Child count
- Loan details
- Mobile numbers
- Email addresses
- Employment status
- Education information
- Login OTP SMS codes
- INN (tax identification numbers)

How Many Users Impacted?

Around 10 million users are expected to be affected by this exposure. Many server logs and passport numbers belonged to Russians, while most INNs belonged to Ukrainians. The server was located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

SafetyDetectives contacted the Russian CERT on December 14th, 2021, and the Dutch CERT on December 30th, 2021. However, both refused to help. The server's hosting firm was contacted on January 13th, 2022, which secured the server the same day.

Potential Dangers

Considering the extent and nature of exposed data, the incident can have far-reaching implications. Such as bad actors can download the data and carry out identity theft, phishing scams, scam marketing campaigns, and microloans identity fraud.

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HEADLINE	05/24 MGM Resorts records leaked on Telegram
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/142-million-mgm-resorts-records-leak-telegram-download/
GIST	<p>On July 14th, 2020, Hackread.com reported that a hacker going by the online handle of NightLion stole several databases from the breach monitoring site DataViper. One of the databases belonged to MGM Resorts and contained the personal data of 142 million customers.</p> <p>Although at that time NightLion was selling the data on now seized Rainforums and dark web marketplaces for \$2,900, the latest reports reveal that the same database comprising 142 million records has been shared on Telegram for the public to download for free.</p> <p>MGM Resorts International is an American chain of hotels and an entertainment firm. Its hotels are located in the United States and China.</p> <p>It is worth noting that lately, Telegram groups have become home to data leaks. Earlier this month, the personal data of 21 million SuperVPN, GeckoVPN, and ChatVPN users was also dumped on several Telegram groups for download.</p> <p>As for the MGM Resorts, according to VPNMentor researchers, who identified the data on 22 May 2022, four archives of files were discovered containing 8.7GB of data. Currently, researchers are unclear about the exact number of affected users, but rough estimates suggest this leak could impact around 30 million people.</p> <p>Details of Leaked Data</p>

	<p>VPNmentor researchers have confirmed that personally identifiable information/PII is part of the data leaked on Telegram. The information belongs to MGM Hotels customers spread across the globe and includes the following data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full names • Dates of birth • Phone numbers • Email addresses <p>According to the hacker who published the data on Telegram, there are 142,479,938 records in the leak dating back to 2017. This includes more than 24 million unique email IDs and over 30 million unique contact numbers.</p> <p>What are the Dangers?</p> <p>Threat actors can exploit the data to launch phishing email campaigns and scams. They can trap the victim through email and SMS by using their business or residential addresses to build trust and even perform identity theft.</p> <p>Since the breach is around two years old, people may not be expecting to be targeted, making them more vulnerable to attacks. However, through the date of birth details, scammers may target unsuspected users. If you want to stay protected, never respond to suspicious emails, calls, or SMS messages.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Ransomware fight hindered; limited reports
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-senate-govt-s-ransomware-fight-hindered-by-limited-reporting/
GIST	<p>A report published today by U.S. Senator Gary Peters, Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, says law enforcement and regulatory agencies lack insight into ransomware attacks to fight against them effectively.</p> <p>While ransomware incidents have been increasingly hitting organizations across the country, there's still room to improve reporting of both attacks and ransom payments which would provide the federal government with the data and information it needs to deter this severe threat to national security, Senator Peters added.</p> <p>"The federal government lacks comprehensive data on ransomware attacks and use of cryptocurrency in ransom payments," the report found.</p> <p>"Current reporting of ransomware attacks and ransom payments made in cryptocurrency is fragmented across multiple federal agencies."</p> <p>As the full report reveals, reports received by federal agencies (e.g., CISA, the FBI, FinCEN) only capture a small fraction of the actual scale of this threat, with the agencies still having to implement appropriate sharing and publicly reporting channels.</p> <p>Other key findings include the lack of reliable data on ransomware incidents and ransom demands, with cryptocurrency payments limiting private sector and federal government efforts to deter such attacks and assist victims.</p> <p>The report is the result of an investigation into how cryptocurrency facilitates cybercrime and the increase of ransomware attacks in recent years.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Hackers target Russia govt. phishing emails
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-target-russian-govt-with-fake-windows-updates-pushing-rats/
GIST	<p>Hackers are targeting Russian government agencies with phishing emails that pretend to be Windows security updates and other lures to install remote access malware.</p> <p>The attacks are being conducted by a previously undetected APT (advanced persistent threat) group believed to be operating from China, who are linked to four separate spear-phishing campaigns.</p> <p>These operations spanned between February and April 2022, coinciding with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Its targets have been government entities of the Russian Federation.</p> <p>In all four cases, the ultimate goal of the campaigns was to infect the targets with a custom remote access trojan (RAT) which most likely aided in espionage operations.</p> <p>The discovery and report come from analysts at the Malwarebytes Threat Intelligence team, who noticed the threat actors' distinctive attempts to spoof other hacking groups and pass undetected.</p> <p>The phishing campaigns</p> <p>The first of the four campaigns attributed to this new APT began in February 2022, mere days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, distributing the RAT under the name "interactive_map_UA.exe".</p> <p>For the second wave, the APT had more time to prepare something more sophisticated. They used a tar.gz archive that was supposed to be a fix for the Log4Shell vulnerability sent by the Ministry of Digital Development, Telecommunications, and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation.</p> <p>According to Malwarebytes, this campaign had a narrow targeting as most of the associated emails reached employees of the RT TV station, a state-owned Russian television network.</p> <p>Those emails contained a PDF with instructions on installing the Log4j patch and even included advice like "not to open or reply to suspicious emails".</p> <p>"Taking into account the use by cybercriminals of certain software and server-type vulnerabilities to gain access to user information, a software patch was released to update a Windows 10 system that closes the vulnerability CVE-2021-44228 (severity level 10.0)," reads the translated phishing document...</p> <p>The third campaign spoofs Rostec, a Russian state-owned defense conglomerate, and the actors used newly registered domains like "Rostec.digital" and fake Facebook accounts to spread their malware while making it look like it comes from the known entity.</p> <p>Finally, in April 2022, the Chinese hackers switched to a macro-infected Word document containing a fake job advert by Saudi Aramco, a large oil and natural gas firm.</p> <p>The document used remote template injection to fetch the malicious template and drop the VBS script onto candidates applying for the "Strategy and Growth Analyst" position.</p> <p>Spoofing other hackers</p> <p>The evidence that points to this new APT being a Chinese group stems from the infrastructure, but Malwarebytes' confidence is low.</p> <p>What is clear is the intention of the threat actor to hide its distinctive tracks by spoofing other hackers and using their malware tools.</p> <p>For example, parts of the infrastructure used were previously linked to the Sakula RAT, used by the Deep Panda Chinese APT.</p>

	<p>Another interesting finding is that the new APT used the same macro builder for the Saudi Aramco wave as TrickBot and BazarLoader.</p> <p>Finally, there's the deployment of the wolfSSL library, which is typically seen exclusively in Lazarus or Tropic Trooper campaigns.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 DeFi pummeled by cybercriminals
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/defi-pummeled-by-cybercriminals
GIST	<p>Decentralized finance (DeFi) platforms — which connect various cryptocurrency blockchains to create a decentralized infrastructure for borrowing, trading, and other transactions — promise to replace banks as a secure and convenient way to invest in and spend cryptocurrency. But in addition to attracting hordes of new users with dreams of digital fortune, cybercriminals have discovered them to be an easy target, wiping out wallets to zero balances in a moment, tanking whole markets while profiting, and more, according to a new report.</p> <p>Analysts with Bishop Fox found that DeFi platforms lost \$1.8 billion to cyberattacks in 2021 alone. With a total of 65 events observed, 90% of the losses came from unsophisticated attacks, according to the report, which points to the lax cybersecurity practices of the sector.</p> <p>DeFi averaged five attacks per week last year, with most of the them (51%) coming from the exploitation of "smart contracts" bugs, the analysts found. Smart contracts are essentially records of transactions, stored on the blockchain.</p> <p>Other top DeFi attack vectors include cryptowallets, protocol design flaws, and so-called "rug-pull" scams (where investors are lured to a new cryptocurrency project that is then abandoned, leaving targets with a worthless currency). But taken together, 80% of all events were caused by the use (and re-use) of buggy code, according to the report.</p> <p>"The desire to develop quickly and save time, or perhaps just the lazy disinclination to review or recreate one's own code, too often leads to the use of untested, and therefore ultimately vulnerable, code," the report says.</p> <p>And indeed, as users and DeFi platforms themselves try to reinvent banking — and a complex new infrastructure to support it — administrators can't overlook the importance of security basics, Dylan Dubeif, senior security consultant at Bishop Fox tells Dark Reading.</p> <p>"No matter how innovative or sophisticated your project is, don't forget about security by ignoring what seems minor or basic," he says. "A trivial vulnerability can end up costing you the most."</p> <p>DeFi Smart-Contract Vulns</p> <p>A prime example is the May 28 BurgerSwap Dex smart-contract-related DeFi breach, which led to a \$7.2 million loss. That attack leveraged vulnerabilities that are so well known that their use here seemed confounding, according to the report. These included exploiting a missing <code>x*y≥k</code> check** and mounting re-entrancy attacks, according to the report. The weaknesses allowed attackers to leverage well-known tactics such as flash-loan abuse and the use of fake tokens.</p> <p>"We can't emphasize it enough — maintain a recurring audit process and test each piece of code before it goes into production," the report says. "In decentralized finance, even the shortest line of vulnerable code can lead to a total loss of project tokens and the collapse of the project."</p> <p>Last August, Cream Finance took a major financial hit at the hands of cybercriminals, losing nearly \$29 million before the attack was discovered (418,311,571 in Amp Coin and 1,308.09 in Ethereum cryptocurrency).</p>

The hack was made possible due to a re-entrancy bug in its smart-contracts function, introduced by the \$AMP tokens used by the exchange.

"The ... breach of the Cream Finance platform was facilitated by the latest in a long chain of smart-contract vulnerabilities introduced by human error (or possibly insider attacks)," Joe Stewart, a researcher with PhishLabs, noted at the time. "It is very easy to shoot yourself in the foot by something as simple as failing to include the correct function modifier in your code — exactly what happened to the author of the Cream Finance smart contract."

Smart contracts become trickier to code-audit as well after they start interacting with each other, Stewart added.

"The increasing complexity of DeFi contracts that interact with one another (possibly even across different blockchains) make it difficult to predict all possible code paths that could lead to privilege escalation and loss of funds locked in the contract," Stewart said.

Front-End DeFi Attacks

The code used to create DeFi digital wallets and website interfaces has also proved to be an easy attack vector for scammers.

In one attack on BadgerDAO last December, analysts said that attackers [exploited a CloudFlare vulnerability](#) to get an API key, which then allowed them to tweak the site's source code to divert funds to wallets in their control, the report explains.

"In late September, users on a Cloudflare community support forum reported that unauthorized users were able to create accounts and were also able to create and view (Global) API keys (which cannot be deleted or deactivated) before email verification was completed," Badger said in a [post-mortem statement](#) about the breach. "It was noted that an attacker could then wait for the email to be verified, and for the account creation to be completed, and they would then have API access."

Flash-Loan DeFi Attacks

As mentioned earlier, another type of DeFi attack involves flash loans. A flash loan is an unsecured loan for buying and then selling a certain cryptocurrency; it can be requested by building a smart contract on the blockchain. Then the contract executes the loan and the trades, all in a flash.

In an attack, cybercriminals can use this function for price manipulation. For instance, last May the DeFi project PancakeBunny fell victim to this after an attacker mined a large amount of \$Bunny tokens and then turned around and immediately sold them off. Not only can the cybercriminals make a fortune in this way, they can also tank the value of an entire cryptocurrency market in minutes.

"Although [this] may seem painfully simple in retrospect, it *did* occur, with not-insignificant consequences," the report says.

The PancakeBunny DeFi project became prey on May 19. Attackers used a bug in the platform and a flash loan to throw the pool out of balance and miscalculate the exchange in the threat actor's favor. Worse yet, just days later, two forks (i.e., new DeFi communities developed from the same blockchain), MerlinLabs and Autoshark, were targeted using the same code and attack methodology.

"Even though the teams from both projects were aware of having copied the PancakeBunny code with very few modifications, they nevertheless suffered the same attack five and seven days, respectively, after the initial project," the report says.

DeFi Servers

Servers storing private keys for cryptowallets are also a prime target for cybercriminals, the researchers warn. In several instances, wallets were swiped with stolen keys, the report says, sometimes with devastating losses; one wallet had a balance of about \$60 million, for instance.

	<p>"Financial loss could have been avoided by auditing the companies' underlying servers and adding technical and organizational measures (such as multisignature wallets) with zero-trust and least-privilege principles," the report states.</p> <p>Preventing the DeFi Pwn-apalooza</p> <p>With so much cybercrime activity, what should be done? To answer that, the Bishop Fox team offered two important pieces of advice for users trying to navigate this new digital financial frontier. One, don't trust any system to be secure; and two, recognize that investments can evaporate in a second.</p> <p>The risk to users varies; in some cases, like the PolyNetwork breach, an attacker stole, then returned, \$610 million in cryptocurrency and everyone recouped their losses. In other instances, hacked DeFi platforms weren't so lucky.</p> <p>Since there's no standard for responsibility, users should be prepared for the worst. "When we talk about DeFi, we are talking about investing in the fledgling cryptocurrency financial system that has yet to learn from its mistakes," the report states.</p> <p>The researchers acknowledge that with so many parts of the business, defending DeFi platforms is particularly difficult.</p> <p>"As the attack surface in DeFi projects is larger than usual," the report says, "teams must ensure that adequate precautions are taken to protect all assets."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Weaponized PDF files remain a threat
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/weaponized-pdf-files-remain-a-threat-research-shows
GIST	<p>When it comes to packaging malware, the file format of choice remains Microsoft Word or Excel, but a recent attack using a PDF file to lure in victims caught the attention of researchers.</p> <p>The campaign — observed by HP Wolf Security — sent the malicious PDF as an email attachment. Once opened, it used a variety of tactics to evade detection, embed malicious files, load remote exploits, and shellcode encryption, according to the researchers.</p> <p>"Embedding files, loading remotely hosted exploits, and encrypting shellcode are just three techniques attackers use to run malware under the radar," the HP Wolf team reported on the malicious PDF attack in a recent blog post. "The exploited vulnerability in this campaign (CVE-2017-11882) is over four years old, yet continues being used, suggesting the exploit remains effective for attackers."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 'No ceiling': ransomware alarming growth
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/ransomware-alarming-growth-verizon-dbir
GIST	<p>The past year has seen a staggering acceleration in ransomware incidents, with 25% of all breaches containing a ransomware component.</p> <p>That's the top-line finding in the 2022 Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report (DBIR), which found that ransomware events in conjunction with breaches ballooned 13% in the past year — last year's report found that just 12% of incidents were ransomware-related. That translates into a rate of increase that's more than the previous five years of growth combined.</p> <p>The 15th annual DBIR analyzed 23,896 security incidents, of which 5,212 were confirmed breaches. About four in five of those were the handiwork of external cybercriminal gangs and threat groups, according to Verizon. And according to Alex Pinto, manager of the Verizon Security Research team, these nefarious types are finding it easier and easier to earn an ill-gotten living with ransomware, making other types of breaches increasingly obsolete.</p>

"Everything in cybercrime has become so commoditized, so much like a business now, and it's just too darn efficient of a methodology for monetizing their activity," he tells Dark Reading, noting that with the emergence of ransomware as-a-service (RaaS) and initial-access brokers, it takes very little skill or effort to get into the extortion game.

"Before, you had to get in somehow, look around, and find something worth stealing that would have a reseller on the other end," he explains. "In 2008 when we started the DBIR, it was by and large payment-card data that was stolen. Now, that has fallen precipitously because they can just pay for access someone else established and install rented ransomware, and it's so much simpler to reach the same goal of getting money."

A corollary to this story is that any and every organization is a target — companies no longer need to have something worth stealing in the way of highly sensitive data to fall in the cybercrime crosshairs. That means that small- and midmarket organizations should beware, Pinto said, as well as very small, mom-and-pop organizations.

"You don't have to go for the big guys anymore," Pinto said. "In fact, going for the big guys might be counterproductive because those folks usually have their ducks more in a row as far as defenses. If a business has a handful of computers and they care about their data, you're potentially going to make a few bucks out of them."

Put into a different context, the DBIR found that around 40% of data breaches are due to the installation of malware, he said (what Verizon refers to as system intrusions), and the rise in RaaS has led to 55% of those specific breach incidents involving ransomware.

"Our concern is that really, there's no ceiling here," Pinto says. "I think we're not convinced anymore that it's going to stop — unless someone comes up with something that's even more efficient. I cannot imagine what that would be, but maybe this is why I'm not in the organized crime business."

The SolarWinds Effect

The fallout from the infamous [SolarWinds supply-chain hack](#) blew far and wide over the course of the year, with the "software updates" vector pushing the "partner breach" category up to being responsible for 62% of system-intrusion incidents (including ransomware incidents) — and that's way, way up, from a negligible 1% in 2020.

Pinto noted that despite the headlines and the interest in incidents like SolarWinds (and others, such as the [Kaseya-related ransomware attacks](#)), dealing with supply-chain breaches doesn't require an operational overhaul for most businesses.

"Protecting against the fallout of a supply-chain breach if you were one of the affected customers is not so different from protecting from several other types of malware, because your servers are beaconing out to somewhere they shouldn't be. If you're a CISO, the techniques you use should be fairly similar to the ones you already use because, quite frankly, trying to go after every single software supplier you have to try to make them secure will make you insane. It's a very big lift."

Where to Start on Ransomware Defense

In examining the entry paths for breaches, Pinto noted that attacks can reliably be boiled down to four different (and familiar) avenues: the use of stolen credentials; social engineering and phishing; vulnerability exploits; and the use of malware.

"The one thing when you close this report to do is, go look at those four things in your environment and what controls you have for them," Pinto says.

	<p>When it comes to ransomware-related breaches in particular, 40% of incidents analyzed involved the use of desktop sharing software such as Remote Desktop Protocol. And 35% involved the use of email (phishing, mostly).</p> <p>"Locking down your external-facing infrastructure, especially RDP and emails, can go a long way toward protecting your organization against ransomware," Pinto says.</p> <p>It's worth noting that overall, 82% of all breaches analyzed by Verizon relied on human error (misconfigurations, for example, accounting for 13% of breaches) or interaction (phishing, social engineering, or stolen credentials). Artur Kane, vice president of product at GoodAccess, says that this indicates a few best practices to take a look at.</p> <p>First, there are the technical solutions, such as requiring multifactor authentication (MFA) and network segmentation by access privileges, along with implementing real-time threat detection capability, keeping continuous access logs, and running regular backups.</p> <p>"However, security administrators also need to have solid response and recovery plans in place for these occurrences, and should conduct regular trainings and drills," Kane says. "[And] user training can greatly contribute to improving the overall company security posture. As a large part of ransomware attacks opens with a phishing lure, training employees in how to spot them can save millions of dollars in later breach recovery."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Open source intelligence changing warfare?
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/open-source-intelligence-war-russia-ukraine/
GIST	<p>AN OPEN SOURCE panopticon—from commercial big data aggregation to information infrastructure across mobile, smart devices, and social media—is reshaping the way intelligence is collected and used in conventional war.</p> <p>Open source intelligence is information that can be readily and legally accessed by the general public. It was used in war and diplomacy long before the internet—alongside information stolen or otherwise secretly obtained and closely held. But its prevalence today means what was once cost-prohibitive to many is now affordable to myriad actors, whether North Korea, the CIA, journalists, terrorists, or cybercriminals.</p> <p>One consequence of widely available open source information is that anonymity is eroding, not only for ordinary civilians, but also for members of law enforcement, military, and the intelligence community. Even missing information can alert an adversarial spy service, says a former US intelligence official who spoke on background. When the US State Department unfolded a public diplomacy strategy in 2008 that emphasized the use of social media, a foreign counterpart joked to the former US intelligence official that CIA officers, working under nonofficial cover at US embassies, were easily deduced because they lacked Facebook profiles. The US government has a gargantuan effort underway to address similar issues brought on by an absence or expectation of digital exhaust associated with intelligence officers' cover identities.</p> <p>When it comes to modern intelligence collection, closed societies like North Korea, Russia, and Iran have an advantage against open ones. Both secrecy and transparency—or the control of information, whether by individuals or governments—are integral to the freedom and security of those individuals and societies. Closed societies can collect an open one's information with ease, all the while preventing access to similar information from domestic political opponents or hostile foreign actors.</p> <p>But too much secrecy on the part of governments and militaries—including those of Russia's Vladimir Putin—can also prevent them from knowing themselves, which may contribute to strategic blunders. Information technology, by its nature, disintegrates boundaries. It erodes barriers to markets across sectors and societies: from journalism to intelligence, crime to terrorism—and now it seems, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, conventional war.</p>

Intelligence isn't just information, says Jeff Rogg, a historian of US intelligence whose work focuses on civil-intelligence relations. The objective of intelligence, compared to just information, is obtaining or maintaining an advantage over one's adversaries—whether that intelligence is secret or open source. This principle is at play when the Biden administration [declassifies](#) intelligence in an unprecedented manner in order to counter Russian misinformation or [shares](#) secret intelligence with Ukrainian counterparts.

“Given the emphasis placed on open sources in the war in Ukraine, it's easy to forget how successful intelligence outcomes can also depend on secrecy, and even a bit of deception. Attributing successes in Ukraine to open sources can also offer a cover of sorts for more closely held sources and methods,” says Rogg.

British scholar Matthew Ford, coauthor of an upcoming [book](#) on the impact information infrastructure and connected devices have on conventional military conflicts, calls the phenomenon “radical war.”

Ford says that the high level of mobile connectivity among Ukrainians and a notable absence of combat footage from smartphones and headcams, especially in the early phases of the war, suggest an effective information operation may be underway. “No doubt the Ukrainians fear such images will reveal their tactics, techniques, and procedures,” says Ford. So Ukrainians may simply be censoring themselves.

Social media platforms and cell phones are also a force multiplier for traditionally weaker military powers, like Ukraine, especially when it comes to coordinating intelligence collection for targeting activities. “Targeting information is now being exchanged online,” Ford says. “Successful kills have been celebrated on Telegram. Chatbots have been established, helping Ukrainians share target coordinates with their smartphones. Identifying targets doesn't involve complex military systems; it works from civilian information infrastructures.”

“The problem with crowdsourced intelligence in a war like Ukraine is standardizing the reporting,” Ford says. For example: “You want to be able to identify the vehicle, geo-locate it, then map against any available signals or satellite imagery, or other collection disciplines, fusing it into actionable target information.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only the 21st century's first conventional war in Europe, it is the “most digitally connected in history,” according to Ford. “If the Ukrainians can make that intelligence actionable quicker than the Russians, they can use their limited remote fires, artillery, drones, and maybe even missiles or air power effectively. The objective, therefore, is to find, fix, and finish Russian forces more quickly than the Russians can do this themselves.”

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion in late February, the [US](#), its [allies](#), and [Russia](#) concluded that Ukraine's forces were asymmetrically disadvantaged against Putin's endowed and historically brutal counterpart. US officials expected the country to fall in days. Yet despite the US's monumental success predicting Russia's intentions and plans and offering warnings, American intelligence agencies incorrectly assessed Ukraine's prospects—the current subject of an [internal review](#).

Facing the full onslaught of Russia's armed forces, Ukraine's military resilience may even have come as a bit of a surprise to Ukrainians themselves, Ford suspects. Yet mistaken judgments about the expected balance between strong and weak powers, accompanied by strategic surprise, may be a common occurrence in the information age. Before the acknowledged [role](#) of social media in fueling the Arab Spring, or the reported significance of thumb drives in more recent [counterintelligence failures](#)—telecommunications, open source infrastructure, and cheap and accessible consumer technology have impacted the parity calculus for state and non-state actors alike.

Indeed, it was the worldwide growth of telecommunications in the 1990s that empowered Al-Qaeda to conduct its successful covert military attacks on US soil on September 11, 2001. But in the run-up to those attacks, the US Department of Defense hadn't drafted a net assessment on the military or intelligence capabilities of what was later described by the 9/11 Commission as America's “[most dangerous foreign enemy](#).” The concept was unimaginable then, but it shouldn't be now.

Similarly, the intelligence community had not authored a national estimate that comprehensively evaluated or articulated the [strategic threat](#) posed by Al-Qaeda before its 2001 attack. This category of cognitive bias is called the “[paradox of expertise](#).” Genuine experts may communicate incredible nuance and understanding of a subject but overlook indicators of seismic changes within the domains of their knowledge.

It’s also possible to make analytical errors by overstating or inflating the impact or outcomes of technology and information on civil society—or any domain—including conventional war. The internet, which promised us a techno-utopian commune of open source information, has arguably turned large swaths of civil society into psychedelic hellscapes, much like the Charles Manson murders after the Summer of Love.

Civilian noncombatants’ use of open source platforms and consumer devices in support of hostile military actions raise serious questions about blurred lines between civilian and combatant—lawful or otherwise—leading to the same subjects becoming legitimate targets or tried for espionage under the law of war. Civilians are legally protected under international humanitarian law, as long as they are not party to military conflicts.

According to recent reports, US intelligence support led to the successful targeting of Russian [generals](#) and the [Moskva](#), Russia’s flagship in the Black Sea. “One of the intelligence concerns people have voiced is that these leaks unnecessarily raise the risks of [escalation](#),” Rogg says. “But consider the Javelins, Stingers, and military hardware we are publicly providing. The US and its allies are fighting an overt—as compared to covert—proxy war against Russia. That’s one of the key distinctions in this conflict from, for example, US support to the mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s, which is one of the popular comparisons you read about today: The US is taking a risk by abandoning some of the hallmarks of intelligence and advantages of covert action, like plausible deniability. That being said, there is still plenty that we do not know. Putting aside all the reporting, leaks, and official disclosures, the exact role and impact of US intelligence in Ukraine will be a source of study and debate for years to come.”

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/24 Targeting covert Hamas finance network
SOURCE	https://www.state.gov/targeting-covert-hamas-investment-network-and-hamas-finance-official/
GIST	<p>While Palestinians in Gaza face harsh living and economic conditions under Hamas, the terrorist group has amassed hundreds of millions in its secret investment portfolio. Hamas maintains a violent agenda that harms both Israelis and Palestinians. The United States is committed to denying Hamas the ability to generate and move funds and to holding it to account for its role in promoting and carrying out violence. Today, the United States is designating an expansive network of three Hamas financial facilitators and six companies across the Middle East and North Africa that generated revenue for the terrorist group through the management of an international investment portfolio. The United States is also designating a senior Hamas finance official.</p> <p>These individuals and companies are being designated under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, as amended, which targets terrorists, leaders, and officials of terrorist groups, and those providing support to terrorists or acts of terrorism. The United States designated Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in October 1997, and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to E.O. 13224 in October 2001.</p> <p>Today’s action targets the individuals and companies that Hamas uses to conceal and launder its funds. For more information on this action, please see the Department of the Treasury’s press release.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Concern: white supremacists go to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/24/american-fighters-ukraine-white-supremacists-00034860
GIST	<p>U.S. officials, worried about domestic security issues, have been questioning Americans at airports as they travel to Ukraine to fight Russia, according to an intelligence bulletin reviewed by POLITICO.</p> <p>The document shows that the U.S. government is gathering information about Americans traveling to Ukraine and is interested in their activity after they return. But critics say the focus on “violent extremist-white supremacists” echoes one of the Kremlin’s top propaganda points: that supporting Ukraine means also supporting neo-Nazis.</p> <p>It comes as Washington grapples with a messy challenge: dissuading Americans from fighting alongside soldiers who have received some of their training and many of their weapons from the U.S. itself.</p> <p>The Justice Department has not said whether it’s legal for Americans to join the Ukraine conflict. But no Americans are known to face criminal charges just for traveling to Ukraine to fight Russia, which invaded its neighbor on Feb. 24. This document shows that if law enforcement officials wanted to bring charges, they’ve had plenty of opportunities.</p> <p>The bulletin also highlights — with little detail — a concern U.S. officials hold: that American white supremacists who fight in Ukraine could return to the U.S. with greater military training. Property of the People, a government watchdog group, obtained the document through an open records request and shared it with POLITICO.</p> <p>A Customs and Border Protection spokesperson declined to comment on the document, citing agency policy.</p> <p>‘Joining the Fight’</p> <p>The document, titled “United States Citizens Joining the Fight for Ukraine,” is an intelligence bulletin from CBP. It’s dated March 7, 2022 — roughly two weeks after Russia launched its full-scale invasion.</p> <p>“United States citizens, including some with previous service in the United States, will continue to attempt to depart the United States with the intention of fighting alongside the International Legion of Territorial Defense of Ukraine to fight in the armed conflict against the Russians,” the document says, referring to a group of foreigners fighting for Ukraine.</p> <p>The CBP bulletin makes note of six unnamed Americans who traveled to Ukraine to fight.</p> <p>CBP officers stopped and questioned five of them at John F. Kennedy International Airport and searched luggage belonging to the sixth. Some were questioned earlier in 2022, before Russia launched its full-on onslaught.</p> <p>One admitted to prior involvement in the anti-government Boogaloo movement. Another was a Marine veteran whose “electronic device” showed he wanted to join up with the “Azov Battalion,” the original name for the volunteer group of Ukrainian ultranationalist fighters formed in May 2014 and brought into the government fold later that year. A friend of that veteran — also a U.S. military veteran and an active-duty police officer — was also traveling to Ukraine the same day by another route, according to the document. Officers searched both men’s baggage and found military equipment.</p> <p>“Ukrainian nationalist groups including the Azo[v] Movement are actively recruiting racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist-white supremacists (RMVE-WS) to join various neo-Nazi volunteer battalions in the war against Russia,” the report said.</p> <p>Another American noted in the document had previously served in the French Foreign Legion and also tried to join the fight against ISIS. A search of his device showed that he had also tried to join “the armed conflict in Burma, Syrian National Defense Forces, and several other groups.” CBP stopped him</p>

on Jan. 27. The document said he planned to travel to a Kyiv sports complex that operates as a training base for people hoping to join the Azov regiment.

The document did not indicate whether the other two Americans they stopped had links to far-right groups. One of those two told officers he had served in the U.S. Army for four years. And in a questionnaire he filled out to join the Territorial Defense of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, he said he had expertise as a Javelin gunner. Another was an Army veteran with demolition experience, who was questioned on Feb. 5 as he traveled to Ukraine. The CBP document said that “post encounter analysis” showed that later that month, after arriving there, he provided military training to Ukrainians.

Besides the American who trained Ukrainians in February, the document did not indicate whether the people scrutinized by CBP actually reached Ukraine.

The document concludes with a list of unanswered questions, called “Intelligence Gaps,” including how many people would travel from the U.S. to Ukraine to fight, what groups they would try to join and what strategies they would use “to avoid detection by law enforcement.”

“What kind of training are foreign fighters receiving in Ukraine that they could possibly proliferate in US based militia and white nationalist groups?” the document also asked.

While it’s unclear how many Americans are fighting in Ukraine, [a March Washington Post report](#) said thousands had signed up. It’s unclear how many have been stopped at airports.

‘Music to the Kremlin’s ears’

Daniel Vajdich, president of Yorktown Solutions, which represents and lobbies for Ukraine’s state-owned energy industry, told POLITICO that the Kremlin will cheer the document.

“This document and its explicit reference to supposed ‘neo-Nazi’ groups in Ukraine is going to be music to the ears of the Kremlin and Russia’s propaganda machine,” he said. “They’ll cite it to justify their invasion of Ukraine and the destruction of Mariupol.”

“It’s like CBP is telling the Russians, ‘Yes, we agree with you that Ukraine is full of neo-Nazis,’” he added. “This was the Kremlin’s entire basis for invading Ukraine, and we now have a U.S. government agency agreeing with that. Incredible.”

Marta Farion, vice president of the Illinois division of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, noted that a key claim of Russian propaganda is that neo-Nazis control Ukraine. Farion’s group is an umbrella organization for the Ukrainian American community.

“That there are white extremists in Ukraine, there’s no doubt,” she said. “But I can bet you anything that the percentage of the population that’s on the right and extremist, white supremacist, Nazi-types is way below the percentage of such people in the U.S. or in Germany or in any other country.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin claims that the “denazification” of Ukraine is the reason for his effort to decapitate the country’s government — even though Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is Jewish. Russian propagandists often point to the Azov Battalion and other far-right Ukrainian paramilitaries to bolster the claim that Nazis have overrun Ukraine.

In a recent [Washington Post interview](#), the head of the battalion, Andriy Biletskiy, said the group “completely” rejects Nazism. The Post noted that he has been quoted previously making white supremacist statements, and now denies having made those comments. The article quoted Bellingcat’s Michael Colborne, who has written a book on the battalion, saying that “there are clearly neo-Nazis” within the Azov movement’s ranks.

Because of concerns about the group, the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act [banned the provision](#) of U.S. military aid to the battalion. [Facebook has also banned](#) the group, as BuzzFeed News

reported. The [group was integrated into the Ukrainian National Guard](#) in late 2014, Al Jazeera has detailed, and won praise from Ukraine's then-President Petro Poroshenko for fighting for Mariupol during Russia's first onslaught.

The day after Russia launched its full-scale invasion, the [Azov Regiment invited foreigners to join](#), Rita Katz of SITE Intelligence Group has detailed. Since then, neo-Nazis around the world have expressed enthusiasm for the fight, with many [aligning themselves with neo-Nazi groups on the Russian side](#), including private military contractor Rusich, as Der Spiegel reported. Katz echoed the CBP document's concerns about fighters returning to their home countries after battling in Ukraine.

"[I]t is important that governments understand that Azov's cache among Western extremists is a very material concern," Katz told POLITICO in an email. "Turning a blind eye to white supremacists fight alongside Azov in Ukraine would be equally reckless as doing the same to Western jihadists leaving to fight in the Middle East."

The group's fighters were the last defenders of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, holding out amid heavy bombardment in a steel plant until [finally surrendering to Russia last week](#). They became national heroes for resisting the Russian siege alongside Ukrainian marines and received awards from Zelenskyy. People around the world rooted for the fighters and called for their rescue.

It's unclear how many people have traveled to Ukraine because of far-right views. Farion said that Americans joining Ukraine's fighters has become burdensome for local troops.

"A lot of Ukrainians from Ukraine that were involved with defense were telling me that getting Americans who volunteer is a big problem because they're not properly trained," she said. "And they have to feed them, and they're not the kind of people they want in the army — that they're more of a problem than anything else."

Just asking questions

A host of U.S. officials have said explicitly that they think it's a very bad idea for Americans to travel to Ukraine and join the fighting. On March 11 — just five days after the date on the CBP document — then-Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby urged Americans "not to go."

["And if any are still there, we urge them to leave,"](#) he added, according to the Washington Post.

The war has claimed thousands of lives, including [a former U.S. Marine who joined the fight](#). But the question of whether they could face criminal charges is an open one. The Neutrality Act, a law dating to George Washington's presidency, bans Americans located in the U.S. from signing up to join foreign armies.

The law is old, but it's not obsolete. As Lawfare has detailed, the Justice Department [used it in 2019 to charge two Americans](#) who allegedly planned to fight to overthrow the government of Venezuela. Both men also had ties to far-right fighters in Ukraine, and BuzzFeed News reported in October that the Justice Department was [investigating one — Craig Lang — for committing war crimes](#) there. At the time of that report, Lang was in Ukraine fighting extradition to the U.S.

Now Lang, a former Army soldier charged in an ambush-style double killing of a couple in Florida, is again fighting on the Ukrainian battlefield. He joined a volunteer brigade in February and took part in the battle for Hostomel, a strategic city northwest of Kyiv, Dmytro Morhun, his lawyer, told POLITICO.

Reached on WhatsApp, Lang declined to comment on his current activities. On Twitter, he posted a new profile picture of himself wearing a Ukrainian military uniform and brandishing an anti-tank weapon. Lang opened the Twitter account — one of three he has operated — last October. His brief communication with other users on the platform indicates he is actively serving with Ukrainian forces.

	<p>Morhun confirmed the photo posted by Lang was taken after Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion. Lang also retweeted a photograph that included himself and other foreign volunteers at a firing range in Ukraine. Dakota Rudesill, a professor at The Ohio State University’s Moritz College of Law, has closely tracked the legal ambiguity surrounding enforcement of the Neutrality Act.</p> <p>“What worries me in particular, to be blunt about it, is we could have a different president in a few years, one who is partial to Vladimir Putin, one who might very well hear complaints from President Putin that Americans are in Ukraine killing his Russian soldiers,” Rudesill said. “And that American president could say, ‘You know what, Kremlin, I agree with you.’ And then that American president could say, ‘Hey, let’s start prosecuting people for violating the Neutrality Act.’”</p> <p>The fact that CBP is questioning Americans at airports doesn’t clarify the situation, he said. But it does show that the U.S. is collecting intelligence on Americans traveling there to fight, he added.</p> <p>“The U.S. government should want to know the composition of forces in Ukraine and should also want to know if there are Americans violating federal law — and indeed, a federal law that dates to the founding of the country,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/25 Al-Shabab a threat to govt. authority
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/for-new-somalia-government-al-shabab-a-threat-to-authority/2022/05/25/e8d817ee-dc09-11ec-bc35-a91d0a94923b_story.html
GIST	<p>A Somali police officer recently received an unexpected summons from the enemy. An unknown caller ordered him to report to a town outside the capital, Mogadishu, where the extremist group al-Shabab would settle a dispute between him and his brother. The caller assured the officer he would be safe even if he showed up in uniform.</p> <p>Overcoming his fear, Khadar traveled to meet with a panel of four bearded men in an office made from iron sheets. The al-Shabab men wanted to know why he was denying his brothers a share of the land they inherited from their father.</p> <p>“After an hour and a half of debate, the men directed me to distribute the inheritance among my brothers,” Khadar recalled in an interview with The Associated Press, withholding his last name for safety concerns.</p> <p>Khadar complied, an extraordinary gesture to an armed group that continues to pose a deadly threat to his police colleagues and his government at large.</p> <p>The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab is projecting authority and asserting a wider role in public life in this troubled Horn of Africa nation, underlining the extent of the challenge Africa’s deadliest Islamic extremist group presents to the newly elected government of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The threats range beyond regular attacks on places frequented by officials and include militant control of vast territory where federal officials don’t dare go and can’t even collect taxes.</p> <p>The group, which seeks to create an Islamic caliphate out of Somalia, is also increasingly undermining authorities by offering a parallel justice system — enforced by the threat of violence — in a country where many have little faith in conventional courts.</p> <p>Some people who spoke to the AP expressed a favorable view of al-Shabab, saying its mobile courts are not corrupt and that the group appears able to protect vulnerable people in ways the federal government cannot.</p> <p>“You will get justice in al-Shabab courtrooms if you know you are doing the right thing,” said farmer Muallim Abdi, a father of eight children who lives in another al-Shabab-controlled village near Mogadishu. “But in the government-controlled areas it will take time, and the formal courts are corrupt.”</p>

Abdi acknowledged that life under al-Shabab is “extremely difficult,” citing the children forced to join the group, the tax burden and the inability to enjoy private property. Last Ramadan, he said, al-Shabab asked residents to raise money to buy livestock to be slaughtered for the Eid feast, an unreasonable demand at a time when the riverbed was dry and some people were on the verge of displacement amid drought.

Al-Shabab “remains in a healthy financial position” thanks to illicit taxation as well as income derived from the ongoing sale of \$40 million in charcoal stockpiles in the city of Kismayo, a U.N. panel of experts reported last year.

Al-Shabab’s tax code compels all those intending to buy or sell farmland to register with the group’s land office, through which sales can be finalized. Farmers are ordered to notify al-Shabab of the quantities they are harvesting.

“Once I harvested and sold 2,247 bags of onions but did not inform al-Shabab because I had an emergency to attend to,” Abdi said. “I was home when two men on motorcycles arrived. I was accosted for not telling them about the harvest. I was detained in a small, dark room and nearly suffocated.” There’s no room for appeal in the al-Shabab system.

Despite the \$1,123 fine he paid, Abdi still sees al-Shabab in a positive light because later it ruled in his favor to settle a land dispute with a neighbor. Both claimants were summoned and told to prove ownership before a committee that found his papers authentic, he said.

“The public would rally behind al-Shabab if they stopped killing people,” Abdi said.

Al-Shabab, which has killed thousands of civilians in the last decade, is estimated to have anywhere between 4,000 and 7,000 fighters, according to the Mogadishu-based security think tank Hiraal Institute.

Although al-Shabab’s extortionate power has been a major concern among traders, some businesspeople said they feel more confident in its mediation of disputes.

“They are becoming more reliable, and the people are counting on them,” Hiraal Institute’s Samira Gaid said of al-Shabab’s court system.

Somalis from minority clans, a growing community, see al-Shabab courts as fair, she said.

Al-Shabab has seized even more territory in recent years, taking advantage of rifts among security personnel as well as disagreements between the government seat in Mogadishu and regional states.

Forced to retreat from Mogadishu in 2011, al-Shabab is slowly making a comeback from the rural areas to which it retreated, defying the presence of African Union peacekeepers as well as U.S. drone strikes targeting its fighters.

The militants in early May attacked a military base for AU peacekeepers outside Mogadishu, killing many Burundian troops. The attack came just days before the presidential vote that returned Mohamud to power five years after he had been voted out.

Al-Shabab’s strategy is to “bleed the system” while patiently waiting for the exit of foreign troops, said Gaid, the security analyst.

The restructured AU peacekeeping mission is set to wind down by the end of 2024, when Somali forces would take over security responsibilities.

American officials cited the heightened threat posed by al-Shabab in mid-May as President Joe Biden signed an order to redeploy hundreds of U.S. troops to Somalia. Somali authorities have welcomed the decision reversing a 2021 order to withdraw U.S. troops.

	<p>Mohamud has said securing Mogadishu will depend heavily on pushing militants out of the neighboring regions of Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle. That could be challenging.</p> <p>Al-Shabab “has sharply increased its infiltration of state institutions, particularly security institutions,” said political analyst Abdi Aynte, a former government minister.</p> <p>Rebuilding Somalia’s security system “isn’t an administrative problem but ultimately a political one,” with the new president needing to reform the security services in a way that’s accommodative of all competing groups, he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 ISIS magazine decries ‘putrid’ democracy
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-uses-recent-talking-points-on-sex-ed-evolution-lgbt-tolerance-to-argue-against-putrid-democracy/
GIST	<p>A new ISIS magazine invokes recent hot-button elements of the culture war and talking points arising from debate on issues including on sex education, LGBT acceptance and the teaching of evolution as the group argues that “democracy and all that emanates from it is retarded and perverse” and attempts to woo recruits to their extremism.</p> <p>The first article in the sixth issue of English-language <i>Voice of Khurasan</i>, distributed online by ISIS Khorasan, reflects recent efforts by terror groups to utilize political and cultural strife in western countries. In August, al-Qaeda formally invited parties such as “the raiders of the Congress” in the United States to take advantage of English-language online manuals that have taught Islamist extremists to construct explosive devices and select prime targets. The group stated that an “impending civil war” can better destroy the country as they simultaneously urged Protestants to assassinate President Biden for being a “provocative” Catholic in the Oval Office.</p> <p>The <i>Voice of Khurasan</i> article decries a litany of social and educational issues that have received increasing media attention as ISIS declared that democracy has yielded “putrid fruits” and led to an environment in which “the family structure has been destroyed.”</p> <p>“Homosexuality is a trend among people with the legalisation of gay marriages and the teaching of it in schools across Europe,” the magazines states. “Even the subject matter of gender is today confused with over 100 variants between the male and female.”</p> <p>Echoing the QAnon belief that a cabal of pedophiles is rooted in Hollywood and the government, the ISIS magazine adds that “paedophiles walk the streets and are active throughout these democracies in positions of fame and power.”</p> <p>The article takes digs at the judicial and economic systems of democracies but stays focused on social issues, such as lamenting that within committed relationships “partners freely mix with people of the opposite gender usually resulting in them fornicating, ending up in further breakdown of relationships and the transmission of diseases.”</p> <p>“The television, computer games and music have destroyed the minds of the youth, draining their brains from the ability to think and reflect upon life and its greater goals, grooming them to become the next generation of sheep that are ignorant of the facts and follow without to question,” the article continues.</p> <p>ISIS has frequently spoken out against voting rights, including releasing a guide against voting just before the 2016 U.S. presidential election that particularly targeted Muslims participating in the electoral system. “The people are given a sense of participation in the government by ticking a box on a piece of paper every four or five years, thinking that they have chosen their leadership when in fact their decision are influenced by the media who are paid off by the political parties to support and favour their campaign,” this latest ISIS-K magazine said.</p>

“These democracies teach children, as young as six, about sex and sexually transmitted diseases as part of their curriculum, together with drug abuse in order to prevent the new generation from being influenced by the widespread ills of their societies,” the ISIS article continues. “There is a culture of free mixing in the educational institutions where they are encouraged to learn, try and test sexual activities between themselves. Homosexuality is taught as something that is normal and part of the genetic makeup and that we should be tolerant of people of such tendencies. The education is secular taught from the angle of atheism using insane and refuted ideas, such as evolution, to try and fill the void.”

“Do you really want to live in a society that has no bounds allowing and tolerating all possible views and practices?” the terror group says in the article’s conclusion. “Why then do we find that democracy is hailed as being the enlightened and superior way of life? Are people blind to the reality of the lifestyle that these nations produce?”

This article is followed with one decrying the media, claiming that the terror group is being adversely affected by “many lies, distortions and character assassinations,” news that is withheld (“the mass twitter suspension is the perfect example of it”), and media organizations casting doubt on the factualness of terrorist groups’ self-reporting.

“Sometimes they will use certain terms or information in order to provoke the curiosity of the people and incite them to enquire and investigate a story which is completely false in the first place, i.e., the announcement of the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, but the natural curiosity of the people will help to spread and exaggerate the propaganda for them,” the magazine said, further slamming media for speaking about jihadists “in a mocking and belittling way, calling them names, belittling their beliefs, their efforts and claims.”

Asserting that this “psychological weapon” is “just as lethal” as conventional methods and is intended to “shake the confidence” of jihadists and supporters while making them feel like “they are wasting their time,” the article adds, “It is about time that we realized that our brothers need our help. And that help is not always by money or bodies, sometimes it is by our tongues and words.”

The fifth issues of *Voice of Khurasan* [declared](#) that disseminating disinformation is a “duty” of jihadists in order to deceive and ultimately divide their foes and should be considered “part of the war policy.” Deploying different types of weaponry is critical for “demonstrating strength,” ISIS argued, as is “spreading rumors to strike fear into the heart of the enemy.”

In their third issue, ISIS-K [declared](#) that a concerted focus on “social media warfare” is critical to advance on the ideological battlefield but also in order to counter the pull of “enchanted” social media influencers.

Voice of Khurasan was first published in February, with a 37-page inaugural issue. The page counts have varied since then, with the fourth issue just 10 pages long and the current issue up to 24 pages.

In that [first issue](#), the group declared that theirs is the “most important province” of ISIS after Iraq and Syria. The magazine furthered the long-running ISIS narrative that the loss of the group’s claimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria is “temporary,” adding that “although we lost the Khilafah territory and thousands of Mujahideen were martyred in a period of 5 years, there is no problem.”

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HEADLINE	05/25 Afghanistan evacuation numbers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/25/numbers-behind-afghan-evacuation-come-into-focus/
GIST	<p>“We got out thousands of citizens and diplomats from those countries that went into Afghanistan with us to get bin Laden. We got out locally employed staff of the United States Embassy and their families, totaling roughly 2,500 people. We got thousands of Afghan translators and interpreters and others who supported the United States out, as well.”</p> <p>— President Biden, remarks on the end of the war in Afghanistan, Aug. 31</p>

Nine months after the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, a question still lingers: Which Afghans actually managed to get on the planes after the fall of Kabul?

The numbers often are obscured in reports written in dense government prose, and U.S. officials are reluctant to discuss the figures in on-the-record interviews.

But a review of these reports and extensive interviews with U.S. officials with direct knowledge of the process — several of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose information that has not yet been made public — show that the evacuees can be broadly fit into three categories, with the smallest containing qualified Afghans who already held a special visa to come to the United States because they worked for the U.S. government.

The Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) program, reserved for people who in most cases worked at least a year for the U.S. government, provides permanent admission to the United States, without requiring that the applicants demonstrate economic self-sufficiency. Spouses and children may accompany the applicant.

All told, according to the U.S. officials interviewed for this report, about 76,000 Afghans were evacuated during the airlift with the goal of reaching the United States before U.S. forces departed Afghanistan on Aug. 30. An additional 9,000 have left the country since then, according to the officials.

The numbers fall into three main categories. Let's take a look at each category in order.

Category 1: No direct U.S. government service

The most opaque category includes more than 36,000 Afghan evacuees, or about 40 percent of those rescued, who could not claim any direct U.S. government service but managed to get on the planes anyway, according to U.S. officials who helped interpret figures in [a Department of Homeland Security report submitted to Congress in December](#).

All of these people — along with the vast majority of other evacuees — have been granted “humanitarian parole,” according to the DHS report. This status is granted to those who have a “compelling emergency” and show an “urgent humanitarian reason or significant public benefit” to gain temporary entry to the United States, [according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#). This means they can live and work in the United States for two years but do not yet have a direct pathway to secure permanent legal residency.

Some might have been related to U.S. citizens or permanent residents or were extended family members of SIV applicants, according to the DHS report. Others do not fit in any category but boarded the planes anyway.

Some in this category of the Afghan citizens who have arrived in the United States might have qualified as refugees, but under the law, they cannot be processed as refugees because they are already in the United States, according to U.S. officials. These officials said the evacuees are being treated as if they are refugees, receiving all of the same benefits, and many have been advised to apply for asylum.

The pace of processing the evacuees has been slow. As of May 8, according to U.S. officials, 5,046 Afghan evacuees have submitted I-485 (permanent residence) applications; of those, 477 have been approved. Meanwhile, 661 Afghans have submitted I-589 principal asylum applications; of those, 60 have been approved. An additional 512 Afghans have sought to adjust their immigrant status through a family member already legally in the United States.

Category 2: On the visa fast track

The second category includes almost 37,000 people who worked for the United States but had not applied for visas before fleeing Afghanistan, according to the DHS report and U.S. officials. Nevertheless, they are being fast-tracked for SIVs and resettlement in the United States.

More than 30,000 of these people, and their families, are associated with the CIA, according to U.S. government officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The officials said this group of evacuees consisted of members of a [controversial](#) paramilitary group known as the Khost Protection Force (KPF) as well as people who worked directly with U.S. forces while employed by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the former Afghan national intelligence and security service.

Senior administration officials declined to discuss on the record the fact that many evacuees had CIA connections. But officials pointed to bureaucratic-sounding language buried in a [Department of Homeland Security report](#) that cites a figure of 36,821 to describe this category: “Afghan evacuees who have applied to the SIV program on the basis of having been employed by or on behalf of the U.S. Government or the International Security Assistance Force, or by a successor mission in certain capacities in Afghanistan, as well as Afghan evacuees who are known to be eligible to apply to the SIV program, had not yet applied at the time this report was produced, and are expected to do so.”

[Matt Zeller](#), an adjunct fellow at the America Security Project who is associated with the Association of Wartime Allies (AWA), a nongovernment group, said he has frequently encountered former members of the KPF, with their distinctive [tiger-stripe uniforms](#), when he visited U.S. bases housing Afghan refugees. He said the soldiers told him they had helped set up a security perimeter between the Taliban checkpoints and the airport entrance. (The Washington Post has [previously reported](#) that Afghan special forces trained by the CIA helped evacuate more than 2,000 American citizens and permanent residents.)

U.S. officials say many of the Afghans in this category would have been eligible to apply for SIVs but had never thought of getting the documents as they had planned to remain in the country indefinitely. But their identities had been kept in government databases, and they had been vetted constantly when they worked for the U.S. government, so compared with other Afghan refugees, their paperwork for resettlement is considered in pretty good shape.

Category 3: Visa recipients

The third category contains people who already held an SIV — the document that is supposed to be the main pathway into the United States for Afghans who worked for the U.S. government.

The number in the category made up just about 5 percent of the evacuees: 3,290.

One issue with SIVs is that they expire six months after being issued. But experts say many Afghans eligible under this category were unable to make it onto the airlift planes.

A [February report](#) by AWA estimated that of 81,000 people in Afghanistan with visa applications pending as of Aug. 15, 2021, the day Kabul fell, 78,000 were left behind.

U.S. officials say they are unable to replicate these estimates and that many people may have had incomplete applications, specifically not having [chief of mission approval](#). Such approval can be difficult to obtain. It requires verification of employment for the United States or the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, a letter of recommendation from a direct U.S. supervisor, and a statement of threats received because of the job he or she did for the United States.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Some Afghans in Kosovo denied US entry
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-begins-denying-u-s-entry-toafghans-housed-on-military-base-in-kosovo-11653415370?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The State Department has started to inform some of the Afghans housed for months at a military base in Kosovo that they won’t be allowed to enter the U.S.</p> <p>The U.S. sent Afghans—many accompanied by spouses and children—to the base in Kosovo after they were flagged for additional screening during the vetting process following their evacuation from Kabul last year. Family members who already have green cards or U.S. citizenship are free to leave on their own if they want, but many have chosen to stay together.</p>

About 70 Afghans, including accompanying family members, remain of an original 200 at [Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo](#)—dubbed “Little Guantanamo” by its occupants—after being evacuated from Afghanistan with their families. In total, about 22 Afghans are still being vetted, of whom 16 were expected to receive notice by this week that their applications for U.S. entry were denied, officials and occupants said, leaving another six cases still undetermined.

Most of the more than 100,000 Afghans who scrambled aboard evacuation flights in August—after [the collapse of the Western-backed government in Kabul](#)—made their first stops at overseas U.S. military bases for initial security screenings. [Some 76,000 Afghans](#) have been brought to the U.S. so far, while others went to coalition partners such as Canada, the U.K and Germany.

U.S. officials said the decision to deny entry for the cases at Bondsteel came after disqualifying information was found about them. They declined to provide further details. Such information could include past links to the Taliban or other U.S.-designated terrorist groups, or a criminal record in Afghanistan, U.S. officials have previously said.

The fate of the remaining Afghans, some of whom arrived last year, is uncertain as no other country has yet agreed to take them in. Each Afghan is allowed to stay for a year, under the U.S. agreement with Kosovo to hold Afghans there. The State Department was working with the individuals to find alternative countries for them to seek residency, officials said.

“What might be concerning to the U.S. might not be concerning to another country,” said one U.S. official, describing hopes that third countries might be willing to take the rejected Afghan evacuees.

The Kosovo Embassy in Washington, D.C., didn’t respond to a request for comment on whether the Afghans would be allowed to extend their stay if no third country agrees to take them in the coming months.

The Afghans in Kosovo, some of whom have been at the camp as long as nine months, include individuals from many walks of life. Some held high-profile positions in the former government in Kabul, such as a former intelligence agency chief and a decorated army commander.

“I feel great relief and happiness for finally being free from America’s prison,” said Fawzai Stanikzai, the former Afghan intelligence agency chief’s wife, whose family was denied entry into the U.S. “After nine long months of being here, I’ve learned that basic human rights is a policy they don’t follow,” she said, referring to what she described as harsh living conditions and limited freedoms for camp occupants.

Ms. Stanikzai said the denial was disappointing after all the sacrifices her husband had made to assist the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, and especially given how thousands of Afghans were admitted last summer despite having little or no connection to the U.S. “They’ve managed to deny someone like my husband who has arguably assisted the U.S. the most,” she said.

Others held at the camp include ordinary citizens married to Americans and U.S. green-card holders who told The Wall Street Journal they had no idea why their spouses had been flagged and denied having any links to terrorist organizations or criminal activity. They described feelings of frustration with the system and with being held for months in difficult conditions with small children.

For months, the families say, they have been living in small, makeshift rooms partitioned using lockers and blankets in a large building. While winter months had been tough because of the snow and freezing temperatures, insects and snakes were invading living areas in the summer weather, according to several Afghans there.

“It’s absolute injustice to be left in the dark without reason or explanation,” said an American woman in Kosovo who was evacuated aboard a U.S. military flight from Kabul with her Afghan husband and three

American children, the youngest age 1. “I trusted and abided by the system for years in the U.S. and now after almost a year of waiting my family is faced with an unexplained denial.”

She said translations given by interpreters at the camp were often inaccurate and she had to correct them during interviews. She said she believed her husband was denied entry because of a deceased family member’s links to the Iranian government and planned to reach out to human-rights groups to assist with an appeal.

The State Department disputed that conditions inside the base are harsh or that human rights have been violated. A State Department spokesman said the U.S. had taken many steps to ensure a safe and comfortable stay, including providing regular cleaning and opening a new medical facility. It said a snake found on the premises was quickly removed.

“We have made accommodations for food, housing, education, medical assistance—including a newly opened medical facility—religious expression, and other needs identified by the Afghans in Camp Liya and international partners,” the State Department said.

One U.S. green card holder said the stress of being held at the camp in difficult conditions had caused her to miscarry after four months of pregnancy after she arrived last winter with her Afghan husband and two small children. She had previously worked for the United Nations polio program in Pakistan, and her husband worked for his family’s construction company.

She said she didn’t know why her husband had been denied.

“The hardest thing is they kept us for so long in the camp with the kids in the snow, the winter was the worst,” she said.

She said that after about eight months her family was told, without reason, that her husband couldn’t go to the U.S. “They are not even giving us the options of the other countries where he can go,” she added.

The State Department spokesman said the small number of rejections showed the system is working. “It is possible that as the system continues to work, there will be additional individuals who ultimately are unable to relocate to the United States,” the spokesman added.

The spokesman said that the State Department would work to find a place that would accept the Afghans rejected by the U.S. and would assist anyone volunteering to return to Afghanistan. No one has been required to return to Afghanistan so far, the spokesman said.

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HEADLINE	05/24 FBI: Iraqi in plot to assassinate Bush
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/politics/george-bush-plot-isis.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A man accused of being a member of the Islamic State helped plot to murder former President George W. Bush in retaliation for waging war against Iraq, the F.B.I. said on Tuesday.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials said they had arrested an Iraqi citizen living in Columbus, Ohio, Shihab Ahmed Shihab Shihab, 52, and charged him with aiding and abetting a plot to assassinate Mr. Bush, going so far as to conspire to smuggle undocumented immigrants into the United States to help carry out the killing.</p> <p>Mr. Shihab was also accused of committing an immigration crime. The F.B.I.’s application for a warrant called Mr. Shihab a self-described “soldier waiting for directions from the leadership in Qatar.” And it alleges that he planned to provide material support to the Islamic State.</p> <p>Mr. Shihab could not immediately be reached for comment.</p>

The Justice Department's case against him, as described in court documents, relied in part on the information gathered by two undercover informants, one of whom has worked with the F.B.I. for more than a decade.

The case could be a reset for the Justice Department, which recently [lost a case](#) that relied on informants to support allegations that four men plotted to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan. Defense lawyers pointed to the F.B.I. and its informants to bolster their argument that their clients were encouraged to agree to a plan they would not have otherwise undertaken. The jury acquitted two of the men and could not reach a verdict on the others.

Mr. Shihab told an F.B.I. informant that he "did not care if he died as he would be proud" to be involved in the killing of Mr. Bush, the F.B.I. said in the warrant application, which was filed in federal court in the Southern District of Ohio. He believed Mr. Bush, who invaded Iraq in 2003, was responsible for the "breaking apart" of the country and the deaths of many of its citizens.

The two informants met with Mr. Shihab and secretly recorded their conversations. They also communicated on their phones via the messaging app WhatsApp, and the F.B.I. obtained a warrant for Mr. Shihab's phone records two months ago.

The informants not only worked with Mr. Shihab on plans to smuggle Iraqi citizens into the United States, but also provided him with cellphones and cellphone data cards that he used to communicate about those plans, the warrant application says.

One informant told Mr. Shihab that he could help him contact organizations that smuggled immigrants into the United States, and obtain false immigration and identification documents, according to the warrant application.

Mr. Shihab told a second undercover informant that he could help him bring undocumented immigrants into the United States, with the help of the first informant.

Late last year, Mr. Shihab told the first informant, who he thought was a smuggler, that four Iraqi citizens he intended to sneak into the United States were members of ISIS who would help him kill Mr. Bush, according to the warrant application. The men would need to be brought into the country via Brazil.

One of those men was the secretary of an ISIS financial minister, Mr. Shihab told the informant, and he planned to use a car dealership in Columbus to funnel money from the secretary into the United States, according to court papers, which gave a detailed accounting of Mr. Shihab's interactions with the informant.

Mr. Shihab told the informant that he had connections to ISIS, including work with terrorist groups to kill many Americans in Iraq from 2003 to 2006, and that he transported vehicles and weapons from Syria into Iraq to supply terrorist groups.

He also said that he was related to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the man who helped turn the Islamic State into a global terrorist network and who died in 2019 after he detonated a suicide vest to evade capture by the U.S. government.

Mr. Shihab asked the informant what kind of security Mr. Bush had at his house in Texas, and whether four or six people would be enough to carry out the assassination, according to court documents. He also asked the informant if he could obtain fake police or F.B.I. identification badges that could be used as part of the plot.

He also said that he was looking for a former Iraqi general who aided the Americans in the Iraq war, and that he and his associates planned to kill him.

	<p>Early this year, Mr. Shihab revealed in a meeting secretly recorded by the informant that members of an ISIS unit, including two former Iraqi intelligence agents, were part of the “mission” to assassinate Mr. Bush, and that he would conduct surveillance on the former president’s house and obtain weapons and vehicles.</p> <p>In January, fearing that law enforcement was monitoring his communications, Mr. Shihab asked the informant to destroy his cellphone. The informant took the device and turned it over to the F.B.I.</p> <p>A month later, Mr. Shihab and the informant traveled to Mr. Bush’s home in Dallas and the George W. Bush Institute as part of a surveillance mission.</p> <p>Mr. Shihab entered the United States in September 2020 on a visitor visa, with the help of a corrupt Iraqi American contractor at the U.S. Embassy, according to court documents.</p> <p>Six months later, he filed a claim for asylum and U.S. citizenship, with the intent to bring his family to the United States from Iraq. But he considered marrying a U.S. citizen when he feared that his application could be rejected, and he paid for papers that falsely said he had divorced his wife in Iraq, according to the court filing.</p> <p>Mr. Shihab worked at markets and restaurants in Columbus and Indianapolis, and he lived in both cities.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/24 Climate galvanizes pro-nuclear movement
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/05/24/diablo-canyon-nuclear-climate/
GIST	<p>Charles Komanoff was for decades an expert witness for groups working against nuclear plants, delivering blistering critiques so effective that he earned a spot at the podium when tens of thousands of protesters descended on Washington in 1979 over the Three Mile Island meltdown.</p> <p>Komanoff would go on to become an unrelenting adversary of Diablo Canyon, the hulking 37-year-old nuclear facility perched on a pristine stretch of California’s Central Coast that had been the focal point of anti-nuclear activism in America. But his last letter to California Gov. Gavin Newsom, in February, was one Komanoff never expected to write. He implored Newsom to scrap state plans to close the coastal plant.</p> <p>“We’re going to have to give up some of our long-held beliefs if we are going to deal with climate,” Komanoff said in an interview. “I am still a solar and wind optimist. But I am a climate pessimist. The climate is losing.”</p> <p>Komanoff’s conversion is emblematic of the rapidly shifting politics of nuclear energy. The long controversial power source is gaining backers amid worries that shutting U.S. plants, which emit almost no emissions, makes little sense as governments race to end their dependence on fossil fuels and the war in Ukraine heightens worries about energy security and costs. The momentum is driven in large part by longtime nuclear skeptics who remain unsettled by the technology but are now pushing to keep existing reactors running as they face increasingly alarming news about the climate.</p> <p>The latest report from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published in April, warned that the world is so dangerously behind on climate action that within a decade it could blow past the targets crucial to containing warming to a manageable level. Emissions analysts are increasingly critical of retirements of existing nuclear reactors as they take large amounts of low-emissions power off the grid, undermining the gains made as sources such as wind and solar come online.</p>

The movement to keep plants open comes despite persistent worries about toxic waste and just a decade after the nuclear disaster at Japan's Fukushima plant. It has been boosted by [growing public acceptance of nuclear power](#) and has nurtured an unlikely coalition of industry players, erstwhile anti-nukers, and legions of young grass-roots environmental activists more worried about climate change than nuclear accidents.

"I am part of a whole generation of people who became frightened of nuclear power, but I am also more willing to entertain nuclear than I once was because there is a climate crisis," said John Parsons, an energy scholar at MIT and co-author of [a report](#) that urges California to postpone the closure of Diablo Canyon.

"When you want to go to net zero and there are hours of the day with no sun and weeks when the wind is not blowing, it becomes a much bigger task to ensure you have enough power," Parsons said. "Nuclear becomes essential."

California isn't alone in taking another look at nuclear. Four states racing to meet their climate goals — New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Illinois — have recently shifted course on nuclear power, [using clean energy subsidies](#) once set aside for only wind and solar to [keep plants open](#).

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) tried to prevent the closure of the Palisades nuclear plant south of Grand Rapids, which powered the equivalent of 800,000 homes before shutting down on Friday. She called keeping the plant open a "top priority" of her administration in [an April letter](#) to the Energy Department that cited the state's climate goals.

And Newsom shocked his state a few weeks ago by announcing that he is now open to extending the life of Diablo Canyon. He had helped broker [the plan](#) to close the plant by 2025, hailed as a milestone of the anti-nuclear movement.

California officials had long argued the state was different, full of potential to go carbon neutral without nuclear energy. But the state is reconsidering as it faces the risk of renewed blackouts and now stands out as a key test case for the new nuclear movement.

The Biden administration, which has [encouraged California to reconsider](#) Diablo Canyon's closure in three years, announced last month [billions of dollars in new federal subsidies](#) designed to prolong the life of such nuclear operations. Days later, Newsom told the Los Angeles Times editorial board that [he is now open to tearing up](#) the meticulously negotiated closure plan.

Getting drawn back into this battle anew has longtime nuclear opponents exhausted. They are unimpressed by the MIT-Stanford proposal. The plan would expand the Diablo Canyon to include a plant making climate-friendly hydrogen fuel and a desalination operation pumping fresh water into the parched state. Nuclear opponents say it glosses over logistical, economic and public safety barriers that have already sealed Diablo Canyon's fate.

"In the process of creating supposedly carbon-neutral energy, you're producing the most toxic material ever created by humans," said Linda Seeley, vice president of [Mothers for Peace](#), a group that has been working to shut Diablo for decades. Seeley was among the 1,900 protesters arrested in 1981 during a days long blockade of Diablo Canyon by protesters.

"There's definitely a climate argument," said Rochelle Becker, executive director of the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, a key broker of the shutdown plan. "But we have look at the realities. We have gotten nowhere on solving the waste problem. ... And how much are ratepayers willing to pay to limp this plant along?"

Indeed, on the sprawling campus of the Diablo Canyon plant are [58 concrete and steel casks housing nuclear waste](#), standing upright alongside one another like bowling pins. They are a monument to the federal government's lack of a long-term plan for spent fuel, leaving it scattered among 80 currently operating and decommissioned plants in the United States. Plant opponents, including the Natural

Resources Defense Council and Friends of the Earth, charge that Diablo Canyon is particularly dangerous because of the high potential for earthquakes in the area.

Yet rallying opposition is tougher than it once was. Nobody expects another blockade if Newsom and plant operator Pacific Gas & Electric move to keep it open.

Anti-nuclear sentiment is fading around the world as lofty goals for renewables confront supply chain disruptions, land use disputes and grid reliability concerns. California passed a law mandating that Diablo's power be replaced entirely by renewable energy. But regulators are still struggling to draft a viable plan.

That has bolstered the case of climate activists like Brazilian model and social media influencer Isabelle Boemeke, whose avant-garde Tik Tok productions [under the moniker "Isodope"](#) espouse the virtues of nuclear power. The last sizable nuclear protest near Diablo Canyon was the one she organized in San Luis Obispo, where dozens of activists demanded the plant stay open.

"For young people, the bias against nuclear power is not so deeply rooted," Boemeke said in an interview. "It is more a hangover from previous generations. They don't have that strong emotional connection someone who grew up the '70s has." Boemeke sees nuclear waste in a very different light from boomers.

"For all the fears people have talked about for decades at this point, it just has not panned out that way," she said. "It sounds scary, but it hasn't turned out to be a huge problem." It's a talking point favored by the pro-nuke intellectuals at the Bay Area's Breakthrough Institute, who note radiation exposure barely factored in the death toll in Fukushima.

Nuclear energy watchdogs call it misleading and dangerous propaganda. The number of individuals who developed chronic disease from exposure at Fukushima and Chernobyl, they say, may never be known.

The World Health Organization concluded that radiation exposure from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster [could ultimately lead to 4,000 deaths](#), even as the official death toll stands at fewer than 50.

The WHO painted a very different picture of Fukushima, where just one death is attributed to exposure. While hundreds died during the chaotic and traumatic evacuation, the agency concluded in 2015 that radiation was not the reason. It reported that the risk of future deaths linked to exposure during the accident is low.

Komanoff said he is still coming to terms with his personal repositioning after working to shut nuclear plants for decades, even if he is hardly alone. One of the nation's most prominent climate activists, Bill McKibben, has similarly shifted his thinking on existing nuclear plants. And dozens of climate and energy scholars have signed on to a letter led by Obama-era energy secretaries Steven Chu and Ernest Moniz urging Newsom not to close Diablo Canyon.

"It was a big part of my identity," Komanoff said of anti-nuclear activism. "If the pace of shoving fossil fuels off the grid and out of the economy were five times faster, I would not have spoken up."

But the economic and safety arguments against nuclear power, he said, have diminished with technology improvements. "In 1985, every operating nuclear plant seemed like an accident waiting to happen," said Komanoff, who is currently the director of the Carbon Tax Center in New York, a nonprofit group that advocates taxing greenhouse gas pollution. "That is just not tenable anymore. It has been 40-plus years without a serious malfunction in the U.S."

He still opposes building new plants, arguing the economics make no sense. The one nuclear plant under construction in the United States right now, in Georgia, has become a cautionary tale of how quickly the projects can spiral over budget and behind schedule. The new reactors at Plant Vogtle Nuclear Power Plant near Waynesboro were supposed to cost \$14 billion and start generating power in 2016. They are still not operational and won't be this year. The price tag has swollen to \$29.8 billion.

Yet some in the eclectic pro-nuclear-power coalition are pushing hard for more new reactors.

They include Michael Shellenberger, a media-savvy energy activist who is making nuclear power a focal point of a gubernatorial run against Newsom. He wants to see California add reactors at Diablo Canyon and build more massive plants along the coast. “Nuclear ought to be what was imagined in the 1960s,” Shellenberger said in an interview, “these highly modern, beautiful plants pioneering our energy transition.”

The Breakthrough Institute and others in Silicon Valley, meanwhile, are trying to nurture a new generation of reactors that are more versatile, efficient and safe, using sodium or helium as a coolant instead of water. The viability of that technology remains unclear, but the Biden administration and private investors are pouring considerable capital into it.

Some of the most effective evangelists in the new nuclear movement, though, are those who came to it from unexpected places.

When Heather Hoff graduated with a materials engineering degree from nearby California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, the plant was the obvious match for her skill set. Worries about radioactive fallout and environmental catastrophe left her doing everything she could to avoid working there, bouncing from a stint with a company making rectal thermometers for cows, to working in a vineyard, to a retail job.

Her uncle, a physics professor who had been involved in a local radiation monitoring program, warned her that working at the plant was a risk. Her mother also warned against a job at Diablo during Hoff’s reproductive years. Hoff finally rationalized when she took a job as a reactor operator at the plant that she could be a mole for the anti-nuke advocates.

“I was like, okay, I’ll go in and find out the real dirt and share it with them,” Hoff said.

The longer she worked at the plant — deluging her colleagues with questions about worst-case scenarios, examining safety procedures, studying the public health and environmental consequences from Fukushima — the more confident she grew that nuclear power had a role in solving the climate crisis. By 2016 she had a daughter and was moved to co-found a group called Mothers for Nuclear.

“I just have such strong feelings that this is the absolute right thing to do,” Hoff said at a local brewpub, where she arrived in an early-model electric car. “With the war in Ukraine and the energy situation in California, it is super obvious now. ... We’ve made it safe to talk about that. What better way to make it safe than to have mothers saying, ‘nuclear is our future’?”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Mystery of monkeypox global spread
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/mystery-monkeypox-global-spread/
GIST	<p>WHEN MORITZ KRAEMER first heard about the new monkeypox outbreak spreading through the UK, Europe, and the US, it was not through conventional scientific channels, or from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), but via Twitter. As each suspected case was reported, and infectious disease experts shared their theories in real time, Kraemer—an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford who specializes in modeling the spread of infectious diseases—became increasingly concerned.</p> <p>“We realized that this outbreak was unusual in its geographic expansion, with some clusters not linked to travel,” he says. In the past, when monkeypox cropped up in Europe or North America, cases could be readily traced back to countries where the virus circulates. Not this time. To keep up with how the virus was spreading, Kraemer swiftly created the Monkeypox Tracker, which collates information on confirmed and suspected cases. It is this tool that neatly visualizes all that is unusual about the new outbreak.</p>

Although monkeypox is endemic in West and Central Africa, it is not known for being especially transmissible. It was first found in monkeys in 1958, but rodents and other small mammals are thought to be the main animal host, and the virus is most commonly transmitted through close contact between these creatures and humans, causing people to come down with a fever, as well as a telltale bumpy rash.

It can also be spread between humans—either through respiratory droplets or the body fluids of an infected person—but this tends to be less common, as monkeypox is not contagious until a person is displaying symptoms, by which point they’re more likely to be convalescing and avoiding contact with others. Mateo Prochazka, an epidemiologist at the UKHSA, says some of the longest transmission chains documented for the virus are only six successive person-to-person infections.

But as the Monkeypox Tracker illustrates, clusters of cases are suddenly appearing around the globe without clear links back to endemic countries. To date, the UK has the most confirmed cases at 57, along with clusters in Portugal and Spain, but cases have also emerged as far away as Canada and Australia.

So what is going on? Some scientists initially speculated that a new, more transmissible form of monkeypox might have emerged, but now the first viral genomic sequences from the outbreak are being published and appear to suggest otherwise. Last Friday, scientists at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium, published a sequence isolated from a 30-year-old patient that suggests the monkeypox currently in circulation is similar to that seen in an outbreak in 2018. Another sequence from a Portuguese patient also appears similar to the forms of the virus detected in 2018.

“If virus genomes from this outbreak are very similar to earlier ones, we’d feel more confident that there hasn’t been some evolution-driven jump in transmissibility,” says Jo Walker, a researcher at the Yale School of Public Health.

It seems more likely that this outbreak has stemmed from a flare in cases within parts of Africa, combined with a spike in air travel following the end of pandemic restrictions, and waning immunity against orthopoxviruses—the viral family that contains monkeypox, cowpox, smallpox, and others—across large swathes of the planet. Jamie Lloyd-Smith, a University of California, Los Angeles professor who has been studying monkeypox for more than a decade, says immunity against this family of viruses has been declining in humans ever since smallpox was eradicated in 1980.

“Eradicating smallpox stands as one of the greatest public health accomplishments of all time,” he says. “But a natural consequence of eradicating the one orthopoxvirus that circulated widely among humans, and then stopping the vaccination program that led to eradication, is that generations of people have no immune experience with any orthopoxvirus. There is no question that this makes life easier for monkeypox. It’s like a big pile of fuel that has never seen a spark.”

But this still doesn’t answer the prevailing question of why now? Studies show that monkeypox has been on the rise for several years in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and other African nations, but the precise tipping point that has led to a much wider outbreak today remains a mystery. Scientists hope that further genetic sequencing and contact tracing will shed more light on exactly when and how the outbreak began.

“The two trends of declining immunity and growing air travel don’t explain why this is happening now and not a few years ago, or a few years in the future,” says Walker. “Maybe a random series of mutations in the last few months set this all off. Or maybe our luck ran out, and it took until now for a monkeypox case to make its way to a major population center, get on an airplane, and kickstart an outbreak without hitting a dead end.”

There is also the enigma of how exactly the virus is being passed from person to person. The UKHSA has suggested that the transmission routes could be sexual, based on data showing that a proportion of the confirmed cases are men who have sex with men, presenting with painful genital ulcers. However this has never been described before with monkeypox, and other scientists have cautioned against drawing such

conclusions at this early stage of the outbreak, due to the potential stigma of characterizing an expanding outbreak as being fueled by sexual promiscuity.

“I don’t like to speculate because I do not think it is helpful and may fuel misinformation,” says Boghuma Titanji, a researcher at Emory University who has studied past monkeypox outbreaks. “Sexual transmission is always a possible mode of spread for any pathogen which spreads by close physical contact.” However, as new cases emerge and viruses are isolated and sequenced, it will become more possible to piece together transmission networks, Titanji says, and it may give us additional clues as to exactly how the virus spreads.

But while the news of an infectious disease that appears to be spreading around the world has prompted concern in the wake of Covid-19, there is far less reason to be fearful. Monkeypox is far less transmissible, with a reproduction number—the average number of people who will catch the virus from one infected person—of somewhere between one and two. In comparison, the Omicron variant of Covid-19 has a reproduction number above seven.

And while monkeypox can be lethal—the Congo Basin strain kills up to 10 percent of those infected—genomic sequences seem to indicate that the new outbreak involves the West African strain, which has a lower estimated fatality rate of 1 percent. So far, no patients are known to have become severely ill, and there are two vaccines already available in Europe and North America that prevent disease even if used up to four days after a person has been exposed.

Plus responses have been swift. The UK is already deploying ring vaccination strategies—vaccinating close contacts of those infected with monkeypox—while the UKHSA has issued a statement saying that those people should also self-isolate for 21 days and work from home. Last Friday, Belgium became the first country to introduce a mandatory 21-day quarantine for all monkeypox patients.

Titanji says countries can follow a playbook of strategies that have been successfully used by Cameroon, Nigeria, Gabon, and the DRC to contain monkeypox outbreaks in recent years. “We know from previous outbreaks that early contact tracing, testing, and isolation of positive cases is effective in interrupting transmission chains,” she says.

Right now the world is particularly well placed to implement such measures, which have been fine-tuned over the past two years. Genomic sequencing centers used to analyze Covid-19 samples have been quickly redeployed to sequence monkeypox, while Bill Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, says he is using the novel viral surveillance technique of waste-water sampling—that is, looking for traces of the virus shed in sewage—as one method to understand just how widespread the outbreak is.

Scientists do not expect the latest outbreak to develop into a serious epidemic, but many argue that it serves as a warning sign for a group of viruses that have long been neglected by public health authorities and scientific journals. Hanage points out that the World Health Organization’s poxvirus team amounts to just a handful of staff, while Titanji says that when researchers in Cameroon tried to publish a paper based on a 2018 outbreak, their attempts were rejected.

She feels that while the current outbreak is containable, it illustrates how vital it is to keep monitoring for future monkeypox virus strains that may evolve to become more transmissible and capable of causing a major crisis.

“There is still a lot we can learn about this virus,” she says. “Every new outbreak presents an opportunity for us to do just that, and be better prepared the next time around.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Scientists to set 1,000 murder hornet traps
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/scientists-will-set-1000-murder-hornet-traps-in-wa-this-year/

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Scientists will set about 1,000 traps this year in their quest to wipe out the Asian giant hornet in Washington, the state Department of Agriculture said Tuesday.

Scientists believe the hornets, first detected in the Pacific Northwest state in 2019, are confined in Whatcom County, which is located on the Canadian border north of Seattle.

“We are doing pretty good right now,” said Sven-Erik Spichiger, who is leading the fight to eradicate the hornets for the state Department of Agriculture. “We know about where the nests are located in Whatcom County.”

The insects are the world’s largest hornets, with queens reaching up to 2 inches (5 centimeters) long. They are considered invasive in North America for their ability to kill other bee and hornet species, which is how they got the nickname “murder hornets.”

Hornets caught in traps help scientists find the location of nests. The state eradicated three nests last year, all near the town of Blaine, Washington, and there have been no confirmed reports of Asian giant hornet nests so far this year, Spichiger said.

Most of the traps will be set in northern Whatcom County, but a few will be set in the city of Bellingham, he said.

The agency is also encouraging residents to set their own traps, to cover more ground.

The hornets will not be considered eradicated until Washington has gone three full years with no detections, the agency said. The first confirmed detection of an Asian giant hornet in Washington was made in December 2019.

Spichiger said the Entomological Society of America is also working to establish an official name for the insect. Asian giant hornet, or the popular nickname murder hornet, are not official names, he said.

The hornets can also deliver a painful sting, which can result in death if a person is stung repeatedly. Asian giant hornets rarely attack humans unless provoked. About 30 to 50 people die annually from Asian giant hornet stings in Japan, one of their native habitats.

Meanwhile, hornets, wasps and bees typically found in the United States kill an average of 62 people a year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

The battle to prevent the Asian giant hornet, an apex predator, from establishing a foothold in North America is being fought mostly in Whatcom County, Washington, and the nearby Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Whatcom County is about 55 miles (88 kilometers) south of Vancouver, British Columbia.

Another effort is underway to determine exactly where in Asia these hornets came from, to try and learn how they are getting across the Pacific Ocean, scientists said. The theory is they are crossing on cargo ships, officials have said.

Hornet queens tend to emerge from winter quarters in the spring and establish nests to birth worker hornets. The hornets start attacking and destroying beneficial honey bees later in the year, eating the bees for protein as they raise more hornets.

A small group of Asian giant hornets can kill an entire honey bee hive in a matter of hours. The honey bees pollinate many of the crops in Washington’s multibillion-dollar agriculture industry.

HEADLINE	05/24 International drug money launder scheme
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/colombia-boston-massachusetts-arrests-5eb0d708057c6c1ac9be03cf06cc1333
GIST	<p>BOSTON (AP) — Nineteen people have been indicted in a complex money laundering scheme to move millions of dollars in drug proceeds from Colombian cartels through U.S. banks, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.</p> <p>The charges brought in Massachusetts federal court are the result of a five-year investigation into the money laundering organization based in Colombia. Authorities say they laundered at least \$6 million through the U.S. banking system.</p> <p>Two people were arrested on Tuesday in Jamaica and three others were arrested in Florida, authorities said. Last month, another person was arrested in Florida and 12 others were arrested in Colombia. Prosecutors are seeking the extradition of the Colombian and Jamaican defendants to the U.S., officials said. One person remains at large.</p> <p>“If nothing else, this case shows that the long arm of the law does not stop at our borders,” said Joleen Simpson, special agent in charge of the Internal Revenue Service’s Criminal Investigations in Boston.</p> <p>Those charged played a variety of roles in the conspiracy, including drug suppliers and dollar purchasers, Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Rachael Rollins told reporters.</p> <p>The scheme involved the use of so-called “peso brokers,” who agreed to give pesos to drug traffickers in exchange for the profits of U.S. drug sales, Rollins said. Criminal associates would be handed drug money in suitcases or bags on the street and then peso brokers deposited the funds into U.S. banks, Rollins said.</p> <p>To make it appear like it was legitimate business activity, the money was deposited into bank accounts held by front companies and individuals or through multiple small deposits into different bank accounts, officials said.</p> <p>Nearly 3,000 kilograms (6,600 pounds) of seized cocaine — with a street value of more than \$90 million — have been traced back to the money laundering organization, Rollins said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 BP agent credited w/killing mass shooter
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/elite-border-patrol-agent-credited-with-killing-texas-school-mass-shooter
GIST	<p>A Border Patrol agent is being credited with killing the gunman in a deadly mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday.</p> <p>An anonymous law enforcement official told the <i>Associated Press</i> that an agent rushed into Robb Elementary School without waiting for backup. The Border Patrol agent shot and killed the gunman, who was hiding behind a barricade, this source said. The as-yet-unidentified agent was wounded but able to walk out of the school, the source added.</p> <p>Border Patrol sources told Fox News correspondent Bill Melugin that the agent believed to have shot and killed the gunman was part of an "elite" tactical unit and had entered the school with a team while Texas law enforcement officials were engaged with the shooter.</p> <p>"I'm told that that BORTAC agent went in with his technical group with other agents. They formed a stacking maneuver while Texas law enforcement was engaged with the shooter, who was barricaded," Melugin reported to Fox News host Tucker Carlson. "They came in from opposite sides. The BORTAC agent ended up exchanging gunfire with the shooter, killed the shooter, and I am told that the agent was injured in his leg. They are trying to figure out if he was shot in the leg or hit by shrapnel."</p>

The Border Patrol is part of the Department of Homeland Security.

"U.S. Border Patrol Agents responded to a law enforcement request for assistance re an active shooter situation inside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Upon entering the building, Agents & other law enforcement officers faced gun fire from the subject, who was barricaded inside," Marsha Espinosa, the assistant secretary of public affairs for DHS, [said in a tweet thread](#) Thursday evening.

"Risking their own lives, these Border Patrol Agents and other officers put themselves between the shooter and children on the scene to draw the shooter's attention away from potential victims and save lives," Espinosa added. "At least one Border Patrol Agent was wounded by the shooter during the exchange of gunfire. On-and-off duty Border Patrol Agents arrived on the scene to assist with transferring students safely to their families and providing medical support."

Salvador Ramos, an 18-year-old who attended a nearby high school, has been identified as the suspected gunman. He is also suspected of shooting his grandmother before the school attack. Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Erick Estrada [told CNN](#) on Tuesday night she is in critical condition at a hospital. Beyond the gunman, officials said [at least 21 people were killed](#), including 19 children and two adults, and several others were injured and transported to hospitals for treatment. A second law enforcement official who tried to engage with the shooter was also injured, but not badly, a law enforcement official [told the New York Times](#).

The gunman was wearing body armor and a backpack when he entered the school, and he made it into several classrooms before being taken down, Sgt. Erick Estrada of the Texas Department of Public Safety [told](#) CNN's Anderson Cooper. The shooter was armed with at least one of the two military-style rifles that he had purchased for his 18th birthday, [according to](#) state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, who said he was briefed by state police. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said earlier in the day it was believed the shooter had a handgun and possibly a rifle.

Uvalde [is a town of roughly 16,000 people](#), situated between San Antonio and Del Rio. The town is also dozens of miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border and has a Border Patrol station.

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HEADLINE	05/24 School district security measures in place
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-mass-shooting-school-district-security-measures
GIST	<p>The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (UCISD) in Texas had many security measures in place before Tuesday's mass shooting that left at least 18 students and a teacher dead after a now-deceased suspect opened fire at Robb Elementary School.</p> <p>The now-deceased suspect, Salvador Romas, is accused of entering school grounds on Tuesday and opening fire, according to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.</p> <p>UCISD's website states that the district has "proponents to curb and/or eliminate" elements of" violence, vandalism, disruptions and fear" in its schools to "provide a safe and secure environment for all."</p> <p>Those proponents include four officers, including a chief, a detective and two officers within the school district; partnerships with local law enforcement agencies; security staff that patrols door entrances and parking lots at secondary campuses; case managers and social workers on UCISD campuses; licensed counselors; threat assessment teams; social media threat monitoring; a visitor management security system; canine detection services; motion detectors and alarm systems; perimeter fencing at Robb and other schools; security vestibules and outside buzz-in systems; security cameras; a locked classroom door policy; staff and student training; and a threat reporting system.</p> <p>The district states that it uses a service called Social Sentinel "to monitor all social media with a connection to Uvalde as a measure to identify any possible threats that might be made against students and or staff within the school district."</p>

	<p>It also encourages "[s]tudents, parents, staff, and community members are encouraged to share information that is deemed troubling" with the district using a reporting system" so that it can "take appropriate action."</p> <p>Tuesday's shooting marked the deadliest shooting at an elementary school since Sandy Hook in 2012. It also occurred 10 days after a mass shooting at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York, claimed 10 lives.</p> <p>The school district first reported the school lockdown at 11:43 a.m. local time. The shooter was likely killed by responding officers but an investigation is still ongoing, according to authorities.</p> <p>As the incident unfolded, Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin told Fox News that the shooter had been barricaded inside. The school, located 80 miles west of San Antonio, serves students in the second, third and fourth grades.</p> <p>The district initially asked parents not to pick up their children and that students needed to be accounted for before being released. Parents were notified to pick up their children around 2 p.m.</p> <p>All district and campus activities, including after-school programs and events have been canceled. Parents were being asked to pick up their children at their regular dismissal times at their school campus. School bus transportation has also been canceled.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Texas school shooter social media
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-school-shooter-what-we-know
GIST	<p>Authorities identified Salvador Ramos as the shooter who opened fire in Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday. The 18-year-old shot and killed at least 19 students and two teachers, Fox News confirmed.</p> <p>Texas Gov. Greg Abbott identified Ramos as the shooter and said the Uvalde local entered the school grounds and proceeded to open fire. Abbott also said the shooter is dead and is believed to have acted alone.</p> <p>Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin told Fox News that during the shooting, Ramos became barricaded inside the elementary school. An agent with the Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC), is believed to have shot and killed the suspected gunman. Two officers were shot and wounded on scene but were expected to survive.</p> <p>Ramos allegedly posted disturbing images online before the shooting, and apparently messaged a woman about his plans before he carried out the deadly attack.</p> <p>An Instagram account allegedly connected to Ramos featured disturbing photos, including one showing a high-capacity magazine. The Instagram account has since been taken down.</p> <p>The same account allegedly sent alarming messages to a woman before the deadly attack. The first message, sent on May 12, asked, "You gonna repost my gun pics?" The woman was tagged in photos showing guns.</p> <p>The woman continued to message the account allegedly connected to Ramos even though she said she did not know him.</p> <p>In one message, she described the exchange as "scary." She then continued, "I barely know you and u tag me in a picture with some guns."</p> <p>The account sent a final message to the woman on Tuesday morning: "Ima air out."</p>

	<p>Following the attack, the woman posted that she did not know the alleged shooter and that she does not live in Texas. She said she only corresponded with the account because she was afraid. She then expressed sympathy for the victims and their families.</p> <p>Tuesday's shooting marked the deadliest shooting at an elementary school since Sandy Hook in 2012, where then 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot and killed 26 people at the Newtown, Connecticut school. 20 of the victims were children aged 6 and 7.</p> <p>It also occurred 10 days after a mass shooting at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York, claimed 10 lives.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Future of drugs is synthetic cocktail?
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5qzpm/benzo-dope-tranq-future-of-overdose-crisis
GIST	<p>When Keisha, a drug dealer based in British Columbia, Canada, first told me she considered fentanyl “safe,” I scoffed in disbelief.</p> <p>Fentanyl—an opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin—is the main driver of drug deaths in the U.S. and Canada, where it’s been linked to at least 250,000 fatal overdoses in the past decade.</p> <p>But a lot of drug users and experts working in harm reduction and addictions that I spoke with shared Keisha’s view. While fentanyl is by no means safe, worse drugs are now hitting the street supply.</p> <p>“Eventually, there's not going to be anything to do with heroin and fentanyl. It's going to be all chemical, all from the dark web, all just something people have thrown in a bowl and sold as fent or heroin,” Keisha said.</p> <p>VICE News spent the past six months investigating this latest—and deadliest—wave of North America’s overdose crisis. We found an increasingly volatile and toxic drug supply, cut with legal synthetic chemicals that can be easily purchased online. The sheer variety of substances being combined means this era can no longer accurately be called an opioid crisis—it’s more accurately a polysubstance overdose crisis.</p> <p>For the people taking these drugs—essentially human guinea pigs—the effects have been devastating. Even with harm reduction gaining momentum, 2021 was another record-breaking year for overdoses in the U.S., with more than 107,000 deaths. Since 1999, more than 1 million Americans have died from drugs.</p> <p>As part of the VICE News Tonight documentary “Beyond Fentanyl,” we embedded with Keisha as she cooked and sold fentanyl, offering it to people who are hooked on “benzo dope,” a deadly cocktail of synthetic benzodiazepines (sedatives) and fentanyl. In March, benzodiazepines were found in a third of fatal overdoses in British Columbia, according to the Coroners Service. Drug users in Abbotsford, B.C., a city an hour’s drive from Vancouver, described being robbed or assaulted, or getting into car crashes, while knocked out on benzo dope, and having “amnesia” when they finally woke up.</p> <p>“The benzos are going to kill a lot of people... It’s already started, and everything is cut with it,” Keisha said.</p> <p>She said when benzos first contaminated the fentanyl supply, nobody knew it was happening—they just knew there was super strong dope on the market. But people quickly became addicted.</p> <p>Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, the animal tranquilizer xylazine is being found in nearly all of the illicit fentanyl and heroin samples and being sold as “tranq” or “tranq dope” on the street. Users are reporting severe skin abscesses they believe are caused by the tranq, including in parts of their bodies where they aren’t shooting up. In some cases, they’ve needed fingers or toes amputated.</p>

“Brown dope [heroin], you're hardly getting sick from that. That was like nothing. Fentanyl was a little bit worse. But this tranq is intense,” said Sam Brennan, a tranq user in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood. “You feel like you're literally going to die.”

While it's hard to know for sure where the chemicals being cut into the supply are coming from without talking to wholesalers, we did identify one easy pathway: via chemical companies based in China.

Nicole Cook, a narcotics analyst for the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., that tracks online drug suppliers, showed VICE News 109 xylazine sellers, most of them based in China, on a single website.

President Donald Trump's administration successfully pressured China to ban fentanyl and its analogs in 2019, which resulted in a drop in shipments to the U.S. of finished fentanyl. But then Mexican cartels began synthesizing fentanyl using precursors bought from China, and other drugs, including xylazine, which aren't scheduled in the U.S., have become more common.

Trying to keep up with clandestine chemists is like a game of whack-a-mole: Manufacturers need only tweak a compound slightly to make a new substance that's technically legal.

“The producers are always going to be one step ahead,” Cook said. “You can't just control every single chemical that ever existed.”

While President Joe Biden's drug control budget included a historic \$85 million specified for harm reduction, it focused on treatment and \$18 billion for law enforcement measures to disrupt the supply. His administration's drug strategy did not mention safe supply—providing pharmaceutical alternatives to street drugs, or making safe drug consumption sites legal federally. Those are the measures drug users told VICE News are most urgently needed to save lives.

For Keisha, the matter is so urgent that she was willing to risk being arrested by appearing undisguised in “Beyond Fentanyl.”

“I have an extensive record and I'm not wearing a mask and I could have consequences from other people that I deal with. It could probably potentially make or break me,” she said.

But she said using and selling drugs in the shadows of society is also driving deaths.

“I want people to stop hiding.”

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HEADLINE	05/24 Neo-Nazi leader attack plots on cops, media
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dgnpz/neo-nazi-leader-planned-attacks-on-cops-and-media-court-docs-show
GIST	<p>The leader of a neo-Nazi terror group in Michigan was sentenced to four years in prison Tuesday after spending years preparing to kill police and minorities and attack the headquarters of VICE News in an effort to hasten a “coming race war.”</p> <p>According to a sentencing memo provided to VICE News, Justen Watkins assumed leadership of the neo-Nazi group The Base, under the alias “AK,” following a nationwide counterterrorism probe that resulted in the arrest of more than 10 members of the group.</p> <p>Since then, Watkins, 27, ran the Michigan cell of The Base, which his co-defendants Thomas Denton and Tristan Webb were also part of. The group had plans to build a fortified compound to launch their fantasy “race war,” as VICE News previously reported. Last week Watkins, who was arrested on Oct. 30, 2020, agreed to plead guilty to gang membership and weapons charges.</p>

“I truly believe that we prevented a massacre of untold proportions by investigating in this case and moving in when we did,” Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said during a press conference Tuesday.

The Base is a neo-Nazi terrorist organization that embraced the idea of militant accelerationism, which urges followers to commit acts that will hasten the fall of society in the hopes of building a white ethno-state from the ashes. One of the group's plans, according to the sentencing documents, involved calling for police assistance to an area and then killing the officers when they arrived to help.

To aid in this possible plan, Watkins “took part in and instructed training on shooting approaching vehicles along the road in front of his residence.” Police say he continued to plan in anticipation of committing mass violence.

“In the months prior to his arrest, Watkins conspired with his co-defendants to enhance their tactical capabilities and firearms proficiencies to engage in violence against minorities and the government in furtherance of a civil disorder,” reads the document. “Their concerted efforts included regularly conducting tactical firearms training, and hosting “hate camps” for members of The Base and other like-minded individuals.”

During these camps in the spring and summer of 2020, The Base “began to plan possible attacks on law enforcement and the headquarters for VICE News,” the document reads.

“News of our headquarters being targeted is sadly only one of many recent examples of the dangers of fearless reporting in the current global climate,” a VICE News spokesperson said. “The recent deaths of journalists in Jenin and Ukraine remind us of the very real threats to journalism everywhere. These threats only strengthen our resolve to bring our audience vital and fact-based reporting that affects their lives.”

Watkins joined The Base in 2019 after being vetted by senior leadership via a group phone call on the encrypted chat service Wire. To earn his fellow neo-Nazis’ trust, Watkins engaged in “firearms training, posting/flying, harassment of minorities, and reading certain books” that endorse terrorism, according to his sentencing memo.

“In late November 2019, as part of his in-real-life vetting, Watkins traveled to downtown Detroit where he walked around the city streets harassing and attempting to bait African-Americans into a physical altercation,” reads the document. “When exchanging messages with members of The Base about the night, Watkins described his actions as having “harassed n*****s and called out race mixers and cucked their boyfriend in front of him.”

Security footage even shows Watkins giving a “Heil Hitler” salute to a taxi driver.

Watkins lost control of The Base after his arrest but was an active member of the group before taking leadership from the alleged founder and leader, who was doxxed. In one infamous stunt, Watkins went to the home of a person he believed to be an anti-fascist journalist and took a photo in front of the door in an attempt to intimidate him, according to the sentencing documents. The home turned out to be the incorrect one.

Watkins also helped organize several “hate camps”—real-life meetups in which the neo-Nazis bonded, conducted weapons training, and shared tradecraft tips with one another—on Webb's property. The group filmed themselves at the training sessions and used the footage to create propaganda videos to post online. Unlike many other members of The Base, Watkins and his co-defendants weren’t scared of showing up in public and even attended a local Black Lives Matter rally wearing skull masks (a neo-Nazi signifier) and carrying assault weapons.

In early January 2020, Watkins moved in with Webb, and a member of the Watkins family “voluntarily contacted the FBI to report their fear Watkins would use firearms he was in possession of to commit a

racially motivated mass shooting, and that Watkins was moving into a home with individuals of a similar ideology.” Shortly thereafter, he assumed leadership of The Base.

Watkins’ position in the neo-Nazi community as the leader of The Base was not lost on him. During one of the hate camps, Watkins spoke glowingly of himself and the role he played.

“I plan on dying and doing my ancestors proud. Like I’m doing my best,” he said. “But then I sit back and think realistically, ‘I’m like, dude, I am the leader of the most like world-renowned international terrorist Nazi organization—me!’”

Watkins and his co-defendants join a hefty list of Base members who are currently serving time. Several members of the Georgia cell of The Base are serving lengthy sentences for conspiracy to commit murder charges, and members of the Maryland cell, as well as a wayward Canadian, are behind bars for smuggling the Canadian into the country as well as several weapons charges.

Michigan AG Nessel [said in a press release](#) about Watkins pleading guilty that it sets a “historic precedent.”

“Let them send the message that in Michigan we will not hesitate to prosecute those who commit crimes in the name of overthrowing our government or perpetuating racist ideologies,” Nessel said.

Denton pleaded no contest to every charge except gang membership and received four years probation. Webb pled no contest to every charge but larceny but has yet to be sentenced.

The Base, while it still exists in some capacity, is a shell of its former self following the mass arrests and high-profile infiltration by an anti-fascist activist.

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HEADLINE	05/25 Lonely, bullied 18yr-old behind rampage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/25/uvalde-texas-school-shooting-gunman/
GIST	<p>The gunman in Tuesday’s elementary school massacre was a lonely 18-year-old who was bullied over a childhood speech impediment, suffered from a fraught home life and lashed out violently against peers and strangers recently and over the years, friends and relatives said.</p> <p>Using weapons purchased this month, days after his 18th birthday, authorities said, Salvador Rolando Ramos shot and critically wounded his grandmother. He then went on a shooting rampage at Robb Elementary School near his home in Uvalde, Tex., killing at least 19 children and two adults and injuring others.</p> <p>Ramos also was fatally shot, apparently by police. The Texas Department of Public Safety said he was wearing body armor and armed with a rifle.</p> <p>Santos Valdez Jr., 18, said he has known Ramos since early elementary school. They were friends, he said, until Ramos’s behavior started to deteriorate.</p> <p>They used to play video games such as Fortnite and Call of Duty. But then Ramos changed. Once, Valdez said, Ramos pulled up to a park where they often played basketball and had cuts all over his face. He first said a cat had scratched his face.</p> <p>“Then he told me the truth, that he’d cut up his face with knives over and over and over,” Valdez said. “I was like, ‘You’re crazy, bro, why would you do that?’”</p> <p>Ramos said he did it for fun, Valdez recalled.</p> <p>In middle school and junior high, Ramos was bullied for having a stutter and a strong lisp, friends and family said.</p>

Stephen Garcia, who considered himself Ramos's best friend in eighth grade, said Ramos didn't have it easy in school. "He would get bullied hard, like bullied by a lot of people," Garcia said. "Over social media, over gaming, over everything."

"He was the nicest kid, the most shyest kid. He just needed to break out of his shell."

One time, he posted a photo of himself wearing black eyeliner, Garcia said, which brought on a slew of comments using a derogatory term for a gay person.

Garcia said he tried to stand up for him. But when Garcia and his mother relocated to another part of Texas for her job, "he just started being a different person," Garcia said. "He kept getting worse and worse, and I don't even know."

When Garcia left, Ramos dropped out of school. He started wearing all black, Garcia said, and large military boots. He grew his hair out long.

He missed long periods of high school, classmates said, and was not on track to graduate with them this year.

Ramos's cousin Mia said she saw students mock his speech impediment when they attended middle school together. He'd brush it off in the moment, Mia said, then complain later to his grandmother that he didn't want to go back to school.

"He wasn't very much of a social person after being bullied for the stutter," said Mia, who spoke on the condition that her last name not be used because her family does not want to be associated with the massacre. "I think he just didn't feel comfortable anymore at school."

Valdez said Ramos drove around with another friend at night sometimes and shot at random people with a BB gun. He also egged people's cars, Valdez said.

About a year ago, Ramos posted on social media photos of automatic rifles that "he would have on his wish list," Valdez said. Four days ago, he posted images of two rifles he referred to as "my gun pics."

A person briefed on the investigation's early findings, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the case, said Ramos bought the weapon used in the attack immediately after his 18th birthday, which was in mid-May.

Two months ago, he posted an Instagram story in which he screamed at his mother, who he said was trying to kick him out of their home, said Nadia Reyes, a high school classmate.

"He posted videos on his Instagram where the cops were there and he'd call his mom a b---- and say she wanted to kick him out," Reyes said. "He'd be screaming and talking to his mom really aggressively."

Ruben Flores, 41, said he lived next door to the family on Hood Street and tried to be a kind of father figure to Ramos, who had "a pretty rough life with his mom."

He and his wife, Becky Flores, would invite Ramos to barbecues at their house and for sleepovers with their son, who was a few years younger. Ramos went by the nickname "pelon," Spanish for bald, because his hair was often cut so short when he was younger, Flores said.

As he grew older, problems at home became more acute and more apparent to neighbors, Flores said. He described seeing police at the house and witnessing blowups between Ramos and his mother.

Multiple people familiar with the family, including Flores, said Ramos's mother used drugs, which contributed to the upheaval in the home. Ramos's mother could not be reached for comment.

Ramos moved from the Hood Street home to his grandmother's home across town a few months ago, Flores said. He said he last saw the grandmother on Sunday, when she stopped by the Hood Street property, which she also owned. The grandmother told him she was in the process of evicting Ramos's mother because of her drug problems, Flores said.

Reyes said she could recall about five times that Ramos had fistfights with peers in middle school and junior high. His friendships were short-lived, she said. Once, Ramos commented to a friend while playing basketball that the friend only wanted to join the Marines one day so he could kill people, Reyes said. The other boy, she added, ended the friendship on the spot.

"He would take things too far, say something that shouldn't be said, and then he would go into defense mode about it," Reyes said.

She and her Uvalde High School school classmates had visited Robb Elementary School just a day before the massacre, wearing their graduation robes and high-fiving the grade-schoolers, who lined up in the hallways — a community tradition.

"Those kids were so excited to see us in our cap and gown," Reyes said. "They're looking at us like, 'I'm gonna be there one day.' It's surreal, like we're in a movie. It's horrible."

Valdez said his last interaction with Ramos was about two hours before the shooting, when they messaged on Instagram's Stories feature. Valdez had re-shared a meme that said "WHY TF IS SCHOOL STILL OPEN."

According to a screenshot of their exchange, Ramos responded: "Facts" and "That's good tho right?" Then Valdez replied: "Idek [I don't even know] I don't even go to school lmao."

Ramos never responded to or opened that text message, Valdez said.

Just a month or two ago, Garcia said, he called Ramos to check in on him.

But Ramos said he was going hunting with his uncle and didn't have time to talk. He hung up. Garcia later saw the photos of large guns that Ramos had posted online and wondered whether that was what they were for — going hunting, or to the shooting range with his uncle.

On Tuesday, Garcia was in algebra class in San Antonio when he started receiving a slew of texts with the news of what had happened in Uvalde. He didn't believe it at first. He opened his phone's browser and Googled the shooting and saw Ramos's name.

"I couldn't even think, I couldn't even talk to anyone. I just walked out of class, really upset, you know, bawling my eyes out," Garcia said. "Because I never expected him to hurt people."

"I think he needed mental help. And more closure with his family. And love."

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HEADLINE	05/24 Texas 2 nd deadliest school shooting in US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/24/us/texas-school-shooting-deaths.html
GIST	<p>The death toll continues to mount in the mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday, but already it is the second-deadliest shooting at an elementary, middle or high school on record in the United States.</p> <p>At least 19 students and two adults have been confirmed dead in the attack, according to the police, who said they subsequently shot and killed the gunman, whom they identified as Salvador Ramos, 18, a student at a nearby high school.</p>

	<p>The Uvalde shooting comes nearly a decade after a gunman killed 20 small children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., before taking his own life. As the deaths mounted on Tuesday, the Uvalde shooting outstripped the devastating 2018 massacre at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where 17 people were killed.</p> <p>The Uvalde attack, the second mass shooting at a school this year, is at least the 188th since 1970, according to a New York Times analysis of data from the K-12 School Shooting Database, which is compiled by the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security.</p> <p>The database includes hundreds of attacks at elementary, middle and high schools in which assailants opened fire on campus. Not including the gunmen, at least 200 people have been killed in these school shootings so far.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Texas school shooting: 19 kids among dead
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/24/us/shooting-robb-elementary-uvalde
GIST	<p>UVALDE, Texas — A gunman killed at least 19 children and two adults on Tuesday in a rural Texas elementary school, a state police official said, in the deadliest American school shooting since the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary a decade ago.</p> <p>The slayings took place just before noon at Robb Elementary School, where second through fourth graders in Uvalde, a small city west of San Antonio, were preparing to start summer break this week. At least one teacher was among the adults killed, and several other children were wounded.</p> <p>The gunman, whom the authorities identified as an 18-year-old man who had attended a nearby high school, was armed with several weapons, officials said. He also died at the scene, they said.</p> <p>“He shot and killed horrifically, incomprehensibly,” Gov. Greg Abbott said in a news conference.</p> <p>As terrified parents in Uvalde waited for word of their children’s safety and law enforcement officials raced to piece together how the attack had transpired, the mass shooting was deepening a national political debate over gun laws and the prevalence of weapons. Ten days earlier, a gunman fatally shot 10 people inside a Buffalo grocery store.</p> <p>“This is just evil,” Rey Chapa, an Uvalde resident, said of Tuesday’s killings while using an expletive. Mr. Chapa said his nephew was in the school when the shooting took place but was safe. He was waiting to hear back from relatives and friends on the conditions of other children, scrolling through Facebook for updates. “I’m afraid I’m going to know a lot of these kids that were killed.”</p> <p>Across the street from the school, state troopers were scattered across the school lawn and an ambulance idled with its lights flashing. Adolfo Hernandez, a longtime Uvalde resident, said his nephew had been in a classroom near where the shooting took place.</p> <p>“He actually witnessed his little friend get shot in the face,” Mr. Hernandez said. The friend, he said, “got shot in the nose and he just went down, and my nephew was devastated.”</p> <p>In a brief address from the White House on Tuesday night, President Biden grew emotional as he reflected on the attack and called for action, but did not advocate for a particular policy or vote.</p> <p>“It’s just sick,” he said of the sorts of weapons that are easily available in the United States and used in mass shootings. “Where in God’s name is our backbone, the courage to do more and then stand up to the lobbies? It’s time to turn this pain into action.”</p> <p>Mr. Biden later added, “May the Lord be near to the brokenhearted and save those crushed in spirit, because they’re going to need a lot.”</p>

The shooting took place on Election Day in Texas, as voters across the state headed to the polls for primary runoffs that would set the stage for the November election at a time when the state and the nation have been riven by political disagreements over race, immigration and abortion.

As the deadly toll became known, the events at Robb Elementary School immediately brought forth wrenching memories of the devastating 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook in Newtown, Conn., that left six staff members and 20 children dead, some as young as 6 years old. Six years later, a gunman killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.

Lydia Martinez Delgado said that her niece Eva Mireles, a teacher of fourth graders at the school, was among those who had died in the rampage. Ms. Mireles had been a teacher for 17 years, her aunt said, and was “very loved,” an avid hiker and took pride in teaching mostly students of Latino heritage. “She was the fun of the party,” Ms. Martinez Delgado said.

For many, the weight of the tragedy appeared to be compounded by its arrival so soon after a deadly mass killing of Black shoppers in a grocery store in Buffalo, in what was one of the deadliest racist massacres in recent American history. It had been the deadliest shooting in the United States this year until Tuesday’s killings in Uvalde.

Mr. Abbott said that the shooter was a resident of the same county where the shooting took place, that he attended high school there and that he had acted alone. He entered the elementary school with a handgun and possibly a rifle, the governor said.

It was not immediately clear whether the shooting took place in one classroom or several and officials did not release the names or ages of the students killed or of the teacher. At least three children — a 9-year-old and two 10-year-olds, one in critical condition — were taken to University Health, a hospital in San Antonio, for treatment.

Officials were looking into whether the gunman, whom they identified as Salvador Ramos, had been targeting the school or whether he ended up there by chance, according to a law enforcement official, who requested anonymity to describe the investigation that he cautioned was still unfolding. The gunman appeared to have crashed a pickup truck through a barrier at the school before heading inside, the official said. At least two law enforcement officials who had tried to engage the gunman were injured in the shooting, neither seriously, the official said.

Marsha Espinosa, an assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, said at least one agent with the U.S. Border Patrol was wounded after responding to the shooting at Robb Elementary School. “Upon entering the building, Agents & other law enforcement officers faced gun fire from the subject, who was barricaded inside,” she wrote on Twitter.

Shortly before the massacre, a 66-year-old woman was shot in her home in Uvalde, the official said, and later airlifted to a San Antonio hospital with gunshot wounds. The official said the woman appeared to have been the gunman’s grandmother and had been shot before the shooting at the school; both shootings, and the connection between them, remained under investigation.

The shooting took place just after 11:30 a.m. For much of the afternoon, as word spread, anguished parents were instructed by the district to stay away from the school. “Please do not pick up students at this time,” the school district instructed parents, directing them to a local civic center. “Students need to be accounted for before they are released to your care.”

Parents and relatives scrambled for any information as news of a shooter at the school turned into the realization that so many children had been killed.

Ryan Ramirez told KSAT in San Antonio that he could not find his daughter, a fourth grader at Robb Elementary, when he showed up at the school or at a reunification point at a civic center. “Nobody’s telling me anything,” he said, adding, “I’m trying to find out where my baby’s at.”

Even before much was known about the gunman, his motives or details about the weapons he used, the killings thrust the debate over gun control and Second Amendment rights back into the forefront of national attention.

Senator Chris Murphy, Democrat of Connecticut and an advocate for gun control legislation, said, “I think everybody here is going to be shaken to the core by this.” He added: “I have no idea how a community deals with this. There’s no way to do this well. Your community is never ever the same after this.”

The National Rifle Association is set to hold its annual meeting in Houston starting on Friday. Mr. Abbott is among the list of prominent Republicans slated to appear, along with former President Donald J. Trump and Senator Ted Cruz.

“Today is a dark day,” Mr. Cruz said in a statement. In messages posted to Twitter he said the nation had “seen too many of these shootings,” but he did not immediately call for any specific policy proposals to help prevent mass killings.

Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a Democrat whose effort at legislation on background checks for gun purchases was blocked in 2013, said, “It makes no sense at all why we can’t do common-sense things and try to prevent some of this from happening.”

Joaquin Castro, a U.S. representative for Texas, described Uvalde, which has about 15,000 residents, as a “wonderful, tight-knit community.” In the neighborhood around the school, more than 40 percent of residents have lived in the same house for at least 30 years, census data shows.

Robb Elementary serves more than 500 students, mostly between the ages of 7 and 10. Roughly 90 percent of the students are Hispanic, according to district records, and almost all of the rest are white.

A sign hanging from the brick school building near the edge of the city center reads “Welcome!” and “¡Bienvenidos!” next to the school’s logo, a heart.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Texas’ grim run of mass shootings
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/school-massacre-continues-texas-grim-run-mass-shootings-84958539
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas -- Once again, one of America's deadliest mass shootings happened in Texas.</p> <p>Past shootings targeted worshippers during a Sunday sermon, shoppers at a Walmart, students on a high school campus and drivers on a highway. Among the latest victims were 19 children in the small town of Uvalde, west of San Antonio, where on Tuesday a gunman opened fire inside an elementary school in the nation's deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade.</p> <p>Each of those tragedies in Texas — which resulted in more than 85 dead in all — occurred in the last five years.</p> <p>But as the horror in Uvalde plunges the U.S. into another debate over gun violence, Texas and the state's Republican-controlled government have by now demonstrated what is likely to happen next: virtually nothing that would restrict gun access.</p> <p>Lawmakers are unlikely to adopt any significant new limits on guns. Last year, gun laws were actually loosened after a gunman at a Walmart in El Paso killed 23 people in a racist 2019 attack that targeted Hispanics.</p> <p>“I can't wrap my head around it,” said state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat whose district includes Uvalde. “It's disturbing to me as a policymaker that we have been able to do little other than create greater access to these militarized weapons to just about anyone who would want them.”</p>

Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott identified the gunman as 18-year-old Salvador Ramos. Two other adults also died in the attack. The gunman was killed by authorities.

The cycle in Texas — a mass shooting followed by few if any new restrictions on guns — mirrors GOP efforts to block stricter laws in Congress and the ensuing outrage from Democrats and supporters of tougher gun control.

President Joe Biden angrily made a renewed push Tuesday evening after the tragedy in Uvalde. "When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" he asked in an address from the White House.

The shooting in Texas happened days before the National Rifle Association is set to hold its annual meeting in Houston, where Abbott and other Republican leaders are scheduled to speak.

Even as Biden's party has slim control of Congress, gun violence bills have stalled in the face of Republican opposition in the Senate. Last year, the House passed two bills to expand background checks on firearms purchases, but both languished in the 50-50 Senate where Democrats need at least 10 Republican votes to overcome objections from a filibuster.

"It sort of centers around the issue of mental health. It seems like there's consensus in that area," No. 2 Senate GOP leader John Thune said about how Congress should respond to the Uvalde shooting. He did not specify what that would be.

In Texas, any changes to gun access would not come until lawmakers return to the Capitol in 2023. In the past, calls for action have faded.

Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, said the shooting in Uvalde was carried out "horrifically, incomprehensibly" on children. He did not immediately say how or whether Texas would respond to this latest mass shooting on a policy level, but since he became governor in 2015, the state has only gotten more relaxed when it comes to gun laws.

Exactly one year before the Uvalde shooting, the GOP-controlled Legislature voted to remove one of the last major gun restrictions in Texas: required licenses, background checks and training for the nearly 1.6 million registered handgun owners in the state at the time.

Abbott signed the measure, which came at the end of what was the Texas Legislature's first chance to act after the Walmart attack.

A year later, a man went on a highway shooting rampage in the West Texas oil patch that left seven people dead, spraying bullets into passing cars and shopping plazas and killing a U.S. Postal Service employee while hijacking her mail truck.

Following a shooting at Santa Fe High School in 2018 that killed 10 people near Houston, Abbott signaled support for so-called red flag laws, which restrict gun access for people deemed dangerous to themselves or others. But he later retreated amid pushback from gun-rights supporters.

Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who won the GOP nomination for a third term Tuesday, told Fox News after the Uvalde shooting that the best response would be training teachers and "hardening" schools.

Democrat state Rep. Joe Moody recalled the hope he felt that the Walmart shooting in his border city might finally lead to reforms.

"And the only answer you get when we go to the Capitol is, 'More guns, less restrictions,'" Moody said. "That's it."

HEADLINE	05/24 Seattle 'chop shop' operating in plain sight?
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/is-chop-shop-operating-plain-sight-beneath-first-ave-bridge/QYCFDL7YUVHPROHG2JUUNEIITLU/
GIST	<p>Car theft victims want to know who is responsible for what they're calling a "chop shop" operating in plain sight beneath Seattle's First Avenue Bridge.</p> <p>According to King County property records, the parcels of land right next to the Duwamish River, overrun by trash and dozens of stripped cars, are jointly owned by both the state and the city of Seattle.</p> <p>Jamie Housen, spokesperson for Mayor Bruce Harrell's office, confirmed to KIRO 7, that they've received complaints about the property.</p> <p>"Over the last several months, the city has received complaints regarding a variety of issues in this area," said Housen, "including encampment obstructions, trash build-up, environmental impact and public safety."</p> <p>According to Housen, the Seattle Police Department is responsible for addressing any illegal activity in the area.</p> <p>Jim Fuda, Director of Crime Stoppers Puget Sound, says due to the SPD staffing shortage, law enforcement is limited in what they can do. Auto theft investigations aren't a main priority these days.</p> <p>"You can only do so much, with so many officers," said Fuda. "Auto theft has been lumped into general investigations unit with fraud, theft, those kind of property crimes."</p> <p>Detective Patrick Michaud with the Seattle Police Department confirms officers have responded to incidents there in the past, however they are unable to talk about any on-going investigations.</p> <p>"The mayor's office, with the assistance of the Unified Care Team, would be responsible for outreach or any further actions that are not law enforcement-related," said Michaud.</p> <p>KIRO 7's Lauren Donovan spoke with a man who works next to the sprawling encampment. Fearing for his safety and job, he will not go on camera or give his full name.</p> <p>The man tells KIRO 7 he's seen two people get shot there and has watched people on the property carry rifles. The witness also says, multiple times a week, the lot becomes so full, stripped cars are hauled out into the middle of the street, leaving the city to pick them up.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 Wenatchee biggest theft bust in area history
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/massive-collection-stolen-items-wenatchee/281-e965cf6f-8cc8-4a33-942e-02bc3f10565a
GIST	<p>WENATCHEE, Wash. — Police east of the Cascades have made an incredible find. Approximately \$200,000 in stolen construction equipment and other materials have been recovered by authorities in the Wenatchee area.</p> <p>There is so much stolen property that it took a team of five detectives two, 12-hour days to process it all. It's considered the biggest theft bust in the area's history.</p> <p>Police had to hire a moving company and rent two storage units to hold all of the stolen goods. There are industrial air conditioning units, water heaters, stoves, refrigerators, beams, plywood, cabinets imported from Germany, hardwood flooring, televisions, a motorcycle and even buckets full of high-end booze. Even that list doesn't begin to cover it all.</p>

Sgt. Brian Miller of the Columbia Valley Drug Taskforce describes the suspect as a "one man Home Depot."

"A contractor told us that looking at all of this stuff, the suspect has enough to build a small house and partially furnish it," said Miller.

The taskforce arrested a Wenatchee contractor who, they say, was hiding all of the loot at his home.

"A lot of these stolen items were being used on his house that he was renovating," said Miller.

Investigators believe all of the property was stolen from 15 to 20 new home construction sites throughout the valley starting late last year.

They were able to make an arrest after a citizen reported a suspicious truck that was later seen with a stolen trailer and traced to the suspect.

Police are now trying to reunite all of the stolen property with its rightful owners.

Anyone who believes some of the stolen goods may belong to them should call 509-664-2310 to set up an appointment to view the cache.

Surprisingly, the drug task force says drugs don't appear to be a part of all this.

Drugs are about the only thing they didn't find.

"The amount of stress this put on those builders and the people planning to move into those homes is huge," said Miller. "It became a domino effect. There is a real sense of satisfaction in helping our community."

So far there has been just one arrest in the case, but detectives believe the suspect had plenty of help, and they are hoping for more arrests in the near future.

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HEADLINE	05/24 Fake cops break into home; confronted, flee
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-impersonators-flee-merceroisland-home-after-brief-break-in/SQUENQ45NZAF5LOQGGJAN6QLYSI/
GIST	<p>MERCER ISLAND, Wash. — Police said a strange break-in at a Mercer Island home didn't last long and nothing was stolen.</p> <p>At around midnight on Tuesday, Mercer Island police were called to a report of a burglary in the 4000 block of 85th Avenue Southeast.</p> <p>The homeowners told officers they awoke to the sound of their front door being kicked in. Three men armed with two handguns and possibly a rifle entered their home, impersonating police officers.</p> <p>One of the homeowners confronted the intruders and determined they were not police officers.</p> <p>Police said the men only remained in the house for 15 to 30 seconds before leaving. Nothing was taken and no one was hurt, but the men fired a handgun as they fled.</p> <p>Officers are continuing to investigate.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/24 FBI: 61 active shooter incidents in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fbi-61-active-shooter-incidents-reported-in-2021-52-jump-from-2020

GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - The number of U.S. active shooter incidents in 2021 jumped by 52.5% from the year prior, and between 2017 to 2021, there was a 96.8% increase, the FBI said in a report published this week.</p> <p>In 2021, there were a total of 61 active shooter incidents across 30 states, resulting in 103 people killed and 140 others wounded. The most occurred in the country's most populous state of California (6), followed by Georgia (5) and Texas (5). Four incidents each occurred in Colorado and Florida, the FBI said.</p> <p>Among these shootings was one at an office building in Orange, California, and another at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado.</p> <p>June had the highest number of active shooter incidents (12), followed by April (10) and August (7). Most incidents were reported on a Saturday, followed by a Tuesday or Thursday, the agency's data shows. A majority (32) of the 2021 shootings happened in "areas of commerce."</p> <p>The FBI defines an "active shooter incident" as one or more individuals who "actively engage in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." The definition implies the use of a firearm, and the "active" part of the term refers to the "ongoing nature of an incident, and thus the potential for the response to affect the outcome."</p> <p>Certain gun-related incidents are excluded from the data, including those that were the result of self-defense, gang or drug violence, domestic disputes, and hostage situations.</p> <p>FBI: 'Upward trend' of US active shooter incidents</p> <p>The FBI also noted in its report a concerning "upward trend" of active shooter incidents in the U.S. There were 31 active shooter incidents reported in 2017, followed by 30 in 2018, 30 in 2019, 40 in 2020 (the first year of the pandemic), and 61 in 2021.</p> <p>In 2021, the number of deaths reported as a result of active shootings (103 total) was a staggering 171% increase from 2020 (38).</p> <p>A mass shooting earlier this month at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, left 10 people dead. Authorities said the alleged shooter purposely targeted a predominantly Black neighborhood. The incident left many channeling the same grief and anger of several other communities across the U.S. reeling from such tragedies.</p> <p>"You expect us to keep doing this over and over and over again — over again, forgive and forget," the son of 86-year-old Ruth Whitfield, one of the 10 people killed, told the Associated Press last week.</p>
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